Commentary
January 1999

Clinton, the Country, and the Political Culture

A Symposium

Robert L. Bartley • William J. Bennett • William F. Buckley, Jr.
Christopher Caldwell • Midge Decter • Jean Bethke Elshtain • David Frum
David Gelernter • James K. Glassman • Jeane J. Kirkpatrick • William Kristol
Forrest McDonald • Walter A. McDougall • Richard John Neuhaus
Michael Novak • Norman Podhoretz • James Q. Wilson

Wye and the Road to War
Douglas J. Feith

The Last Time I Saw Paris
André Aciman

Among the Gender Benders
Wendy Shalit

Terrorism at the Multiplex
Joshua Muravchik

Books in Review
Sam Tanenhaus • John Gross • Max Boot
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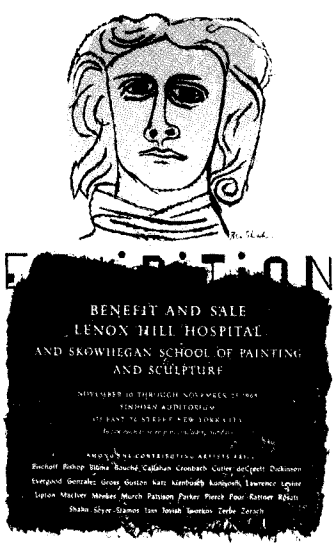

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Vol. 107 · January 1999 · No. 1

A Symposium

20

Clinton, the Country, and the Political Culture

21 *Robert L. Bartley*
22 *William J. Bennett*
23 *William F. Buckley, Jr.*
24 *Christopher Caldwell*
25 *Midge Decter*
27 *Jean Bethke Elshtain*
28 *David Frum*
29 *David Gelernter*
30 *James K. Glassman*
32 *Jeane J. Kirkpatrick*
33 *William Kristol*
34 *Forrest McDonald*
35 *Walter A. McDougall*
37 *Richard John Neuhaus*
38 *Michael Novak*
39 *Norman Podhoretz*
41 *James Q. Wilson*

Articles

43

Wye and the Road to War *Douglas J. Feith*
Under Washington's benign aegis, the Palestinian Authority's intransigence grows unrelentingly; likewise its capacity for mayhem.

48

The Last Time I Saw Paris *André Aciman*
There may be no revisiting a city made for memory.

Observations

54

Among the Gender Benders *Wendy Shalit*
All is well—or is it?—on the "anti-essentialist" frontier beyond male and female.

Movies

57

Terrorism at the Multiplex *Joshua Muravchik*
A new Hollywood thriller fails the test of one kind of truthfulness; its detractors fail another.

Letters

3

Conservative Judaism; Philip Roth; Private Ryan; etc.

Books

61 Lindbergh by A. Scott Berg *Sam Tanenhaus*
63 Bech at Bay by John Updike *John Gross*
66 The Wrong War by Jeffrey Record *Max Boot*
68 Najib Mahfuz by Menahem Milson *Daniel Pipes*
70 The Story of American Freedom by Eric Foner *James Nuechterlein*

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Publisher Jonathan R. Cohen
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Commentary
January 1999

Letters from Readers

Conservative Judaism

To the Editor:

In Clifford E. Librach's article, "Does Conservative Judaism Have a Future?" [September 1998], it was gratifying to read praise of *Tradition Renewed*, the recently published two-volume history of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) edited by Jack Wertheimer. But it is curious that having reviewed so exhaustive a study of the institution and paid tribute to its complexity, Rabbi Librach would then so narrowly define it. It seems clear from his conclusions and his negative vision of the future that he has discerned only a small piece of the reality that is JTS.

It is perhaps understandable that Rabbi Librach, whose home is in the Reform movement, would lack knowledge of the Conservative movement's institutions. What he calls the "Seminary's committee on Jewish law and standards" is, instead, described succinctly by one of its members as the "consultative body of the Conservative movement on *halakhic* matters, . . . one that does not decide one correct answer to a question, instead setting the *halakhic* boundaries within Conservative Judaism."

After correctly describing the recent alliance with Reform as a political one, forged for the purpose of defending religious pluralism in Israel, Rabbi Librach predicts, in a stunningly counterintuitive and erroneous conclusion, that JTS and the Conservative movement will tumble down a slippery slope "away from the norms of law and tradition."

Rabbi Librach's twin theories—Conservative and Reform practice moving ever closer, and JTS as a dinosaur moving toward extinction—are fatally flawed by several other errors, significantly his overstatement of the impact of some opinions within the movement, for example that of Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff sanctioning homosexual unions. (Another point of information: the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, where Rabbi Dorff is rector, is no longer a JTS campus.)

JTS is dedicated to the ideal of religious pluralism within the parameters of *halakhic* Conservative Jewish practice. As a world-class university whose mission is the spread of Judaism, JTS strengthens the foundation of the Conservative movement and upholds its tenets.

Karen R. Klestzick
Director of Communications
Jewish Theological Seminary
New York City

To the Editor:

Clifford E. Librach cites two of the positions that I have taken as part of his argument that the Conservative movement has lost its roots in tradition and that, with the increasing traditionalism of Reform, the Conservative movement no longer has a distinct identity or mission. I would like to challenge both his understanding of my positions and his general thesis.

First, in most matters I am somewhere in the center of the Conservative movement. That is evidenced not only by my personal religious practice, but also by the overwhelming votes of my colleagues on the committee on Jewish law and standards in favor of ten rabbinic rulings that I have written for their consideration over the last fourteen years. However, as I have explicitly written in my recent book, *Matters of Life and Death: A Jewish Approach to Medical Ethics*, my position on homosexual commitment ceremonies "is definitely outside the mainstream of the Conservative movement, at least as of now." Thus, to invoke my position on this topic, as Rabbi Librach does, to indicate that the Conservative movement as a whole has become like the Reform

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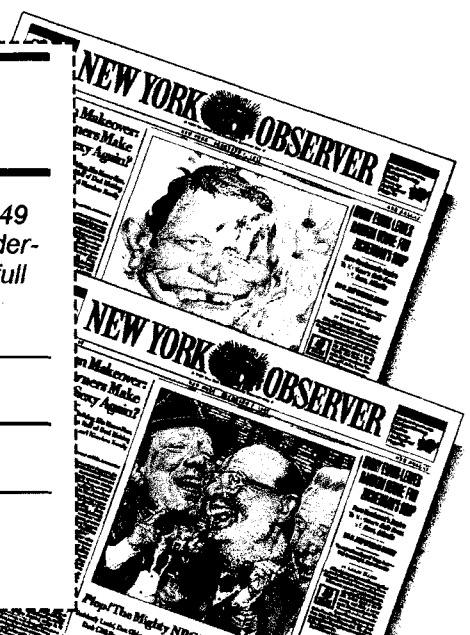

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movement on this issue is both false and misleading.

I maintain that we should be doing commitment ceremonies for homosexuals to encourage monogamy (a moral reason) and safety (a medical reason). I specifically argue for this position in classical legal form, as is typical of the Conservative movement, where Jewish law is held to be binding. Those in the Reform movement who share my view on this matter have generally felt no need to defend it in this way, for Reform Judaism does not affirm the legal authority of Jewish law.

Second, I have indeed written that we should understand Jewish law on women as being determined by custom rather than by legal reasoning (*Conservative Judaism*, Spring 1997). As I argued in my article, this is not a new approach; the classical rabbis did the very same thing *on this topic*.

To move from Rabbi Librach's citation of my own opinions to his general thesis, the ideologies of Reform and Conservative Judaism remain, as he says, quite different. He claims, however, that the realities of the two movements are no longer very distinct. As a traditional Jew, I certainly welcome the efforts on the part of the current leadership of the Reform movement to increase the Jewish education and practice of Reform Jews. In the meantime, very real differences mark the Conservative from the Reform movement:

• Every Conservative congregation that has a kosher one; few Reform congregations have kosher facilities, and in those that do, kosher meals are optional.

• Something like 95 percent of Conservative worship is in Hebrew. The Reform prayer book, *Gates of Prayer*, has increased the amount of Hebrew over what it was in the older *Union Prayer Book*, but even the most Hebraic services in *Gates of Prayer* use Hebrew for less than half the service.

• Every Conservative synagogue holds services on Saturday mornings, while Saturday-morning services take place in most Reform congregations only when there is a bar or bat mitzvah.

• Every Conservative synagogue that can do so holds morning and evening services daily. I know of no Reform congregation that does.

• Conservative day (and supplementary) schools spend more time on Jewish studies and focus more on traditional texts than do their Reform counterparts. Similar curricular differences characterize adult education in the two movements, including conversion programs and the schooling of future educators and rabbis.

• When a Jewish couple divorces in civil law, Conservative rabbis require that they procure a Jewish writ of divorce (*get*) before remarriage is permitted. Reform rabbis do not require this document, with the result that, according to Jewish law, children from a woman's second marriage are illegitimate (*mamzerim*).

• Despite considerable sociological pressure, the Conservative movement continues to define Jews in the traditional way—namely, as the children of Jewish women or those who have been converted to Judaism according to *halakhah*. The Reform movement also includes as Jews those whose fathers, but not whose mothers, are Jewish, and not all Reform rabbis insist on the traditional rituals of conversion.

• Conservative standards forbid synagogue membership to non-Jews, even if they are married to Jews.

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Many members of Reform congregations are non-Jews, failing to fulfill any standard of Jewish identity.

The list could go on. Suffice it to say that, contrary to Rabbi Librach, the Conservative movement remains the voice of traditional, modern Judaism in our time, just as much as it was in times past. As these differences amply demonstrate, the much-ballyhooed trans-denominationalism that Rabbi Librach and others affirm is greatly exaggerated.

[RABBI] ELLIOT N. DORFF
Rector, University of Judaism
Los Angeles, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Clifford E. Librach points to the alleged demographic disappearance of American Judaism's religious center. Nonsense. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey indicates that among synagogue members in the U.S., the single largest group is Conservative Jews. Even more explicit is the 1995-96 survey of 400 Conservative congregations conducted by the JTS Ratner Center, which found that the Conservative movement—without adopting patrilineal descent, rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages, or membership for non-Jewish spouses in congregational life—has more than held its own. Not only are young families joining at a necessary "replacement rate," but compared to ten years ago, 21 percent of the synagogues are "dramatically larger," 27 percent are "somewhat larger," and 21 percent are "about the same."

The Ratner study also reveals that baby boomers have entered impressively into the religious life of Conservative synagogues, even while these synagogues have remained committed to both traditional and egalitarian liturgy. Today, 51 percent of members aged 35-44 as well as 42 percent in the age cohort 45-54 "attend synagogue services at least once a month." Not only are these rates mounting, they are notably higher than the 31-percent figure for older members aged 55-64.

Indeed, in contrast to the past, an expanding core group of younger Conservative Jews sends their sons and daughters to Jewish day schools, to the Conservative movement's Camp Ramah, to United Synagogue Youth, to Israel experiences, and to other venues for intensive Jewish identification.

Whereas in previous generations Conservative Judaism was described by many of its adherents as "wishy-washy," simply an address for congregants who were neither Reform nor Orthodox, the Ratner report points out that "most members of Conservative synagogues . . . are genuinely attracted to Conservatism . . . and, as a group, they demonstrate a clear affinity for several elements of the Conservative movement's ideology."

Rabbi Librach, the center is doing quite well, thank you.

[RABBI] ALAN SILVERSTEIN
Past President, Rabbinical Assembly
Caldwell, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Clifford E. Librach's prognosis for Conservative Judaism, albeit compelling in some respects, wrongly undermines those within the movement who, at considerable personal risk, have struggled to maintain its distinctive norms and ethos and its unique blend of Jewish tradition and modern American culture. Over a decade ago, the creedal statement of Conservative Judaism, *Emet V'emuna*, argued that, with the important exception of including women in the rabbinate and liturgical functions, the standards of Jewish tradition and history must continue to prevail within the movement. Since that time, Conservative leadership has successfully and consistently resisted efforts to dilute

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these standards on questions of mixed marriages, homosexuality, and patrilineal descent.

Within the past year, Rabbi William Lebeau, the vice chancellor and dean of the Jewish Theological Seminary's rabbinical school, articulated traditional norms of sexuality for rabbinical students in a public letter to the student body. JTS provost Jack Wertheimer has consistently argued, in these pages and elsewhere, for a Conservative language of commitments and demands—even if these run counter to many of the prevailing currents of American culture. Longstanding academic policy at JTS has placed expectations upon faculty to uphold traditional Jewish norms and practices, including that spouses be Jews. Instead of too glibly predicting the dilution of Conservative Judaism into theological blandness (or worse), external critics like Rabbi Librach would do better to endorse these efforts by Conservative leaders to maintain a distinctively Jewish ethos.

If Rabbi Librach is so pessimistic about current trends within Conservative Judaism—and presumably he has similar fears for the future of Reform Judaism—why, one may ask, does he not pursue the logic of his convictions and adopt Orthodox Judaism? He suggests an answer to this question when he singles out for praise certain trends toward greater Jewish learning and religiosity within his own Reform movement. By remaining within, and working to encourage these trends, Rabbi Librach offers a model for how Reform Judaism may continue to help preserve the Jewish future. Do not similar efforts within Conservative Judaism warrant his support and encouragement?

STEVEN BAYME
National Director,
Jewish Communal Affairs Department
American Jewish Committee
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

The article by Clifford E. Librach was puzzling in several ways, one of which was its failure to grapple with the role of Reconstructionist Judaism in the history of Conservative Judaism. It was the unwillingness of the Conservative leadership to follow the direction suggested by Mordecai Kaplan, one of the greats of the JTS faculty for over 50 years, that resulted in the Reconstructionist movement's breaking away from the left wing of Conservative Judaism. Given that the Reconstructionist movement now numbers nearly 100 congregations and is growing at a rate of 15 percent a year, it is odd that Rabbi Librach did not note the phenomenon.

Perhaps more oddly, he draws an almost incomprehensible analogy between the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and a school of osteopathic medicine. In fact, the college is a fully accredited institution that offers a master of arts in Jewish studies and cantorial degrees as well as the rabbinic degree. It is attracting first-rate students from across North America, has an outstanding faculty, and has graduated over 200 rabbis, who are now serving in congregations and campus Hillel houses and as chaplains across the United States and around the world. I suspect Rabbi Librach's remark is simply a product of ignorance about the college. His analysis of rabbinic education leaves much to be desired.

DAVID A. TEUTSCH
President,
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Wyncote, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

In his analysis of Conservative Judaism and other "mainstream" Jewish movements, Clifford E. Librach characterizes the Academy for Jewish Religion (AJR) as "the equivalent of an offshore medical

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school," implying that the Academy's students are not able to gain admission to JTS or the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College (HUC). The fact is that the overwhelming percentage of AJR rabbinical and cantorial students (many of whom *were* accepted by JTS or HUC) do not choose to study at AJR by default but because it offers them a unique group experience where a pluralistic approach produces spiritual leaders who are best capable of leading forward-looking, involved congregations.

Even more important, considering the focus of Rabbi Librach's article, these congregations are increasingly seeking spiritual leaders who can work effectively with an empowered constituency representing the full spectrum of belief, observance, and practice. Indeed, the demand for AJR rabbis and cantors far surpasses our ability to train and replace them. This divergence between supply and demand will only become more acute with the growing need to train a "new" kind of rabbi and cantor for the 21st century. To borrow a cliché, the future is already here.

STEVEN M. FRIEDLANDER
Academy for Jewish Religion
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Clifford E. Librach, himself the rabbi of a Reform congregation, refers to Reform Judaism as a "way-station for Conservative Jews on the road to religious oblivion." Yet there are no data of which I am aware indicating that a significant proportion of secular Jews has passed through the Reform movement. Nor have I seen any factual support for the notion that Reform Jews frequently leave religion altogether.

Indeed, the existence of third and fourth generations of Reform Jews attests to the stability of this branch of Judaism. Although many members of Reform congregations have a weak attachment to the tenets of Judaism, and the fate of their children is very uncertain, the vast majority find Reform to be authentic and consonant with their lives. I suspect that the drift to secularism among Conservative Jews is direct, without a stop at Reform.

I would have hoped that Rabbi Librach would have a better understanding of the Reform movement and its importance in preserving Judaism. Unlike him, I see the robust history of Reform as a source of hope for the future.

MELVIN FARMELANT
Worcester, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Clifford E. Librach asserts that the "population pool" for Conservative Judaism is "slipping away, first into Reform, and then into the moral vacuum of secular America." Such a baseless canard about secularism should not go unremarked, as there is no evidence that secularism is associated with a "moral vacuum." Indeed, even if there has been a decline in America's morals, it has been accompanied by a religious revival.

Granted that when Reform Jews assimilate completely, it is a loss to the Jewish people, but they do not become immoral because they admit their loss of blind faith. Thoughtless criticism of secularism should be particularly avoided by Jews, who have been persecuted throughout the ages by other "moral" religions. The Jewish people are linked by history and by a culture, not just by a religion (about which we often disagree), and many Jews feel a strong sense of Jewish identity without retaining the Iron Age beliefs of our ancestors. Secular Jews established modern Israel, an achievement beyond the grasp of the God-fearing remnant in historic Palestine.

Immorality is not the special province of secular Americans or Israelis, who at least do not display the intolerance of the stone-throwing ultra-Orthodox. Whether intentionally or not, Rabbi Librach's remark comes distressingly close to revealing such intolerance.

LAWRENCE I. BONCHEK
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

"Does Conservative Judaism Have a Future?" is a thoughtful and useful article. It reminded me of an essay written in the 1960's by the late Eliezer Berkovits, a leading modern Orthodox rabbi. Rabbi Berkovits dealt with Judaism in an age of ecumenicism, and his thesis was that ecumenical developments tend to be a sign of weakness, not strength. When movements are strong and growing, he argued, they tend to be very protective of turf, and not open to calls for merger. Mergers come from movements uncertain of the future. Could this be one reason for the talk of Reform-Conservative merger that Rabbi Librach explores?

DONALD FELDSTEIN
Teaneck, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Compliments on Clifford E. Librach's fine piece of writing for its vigor and intellectual energy—also for his comments, which are right on target. I marvel that good people are coming right along and COMMENTARY keeps finding them.

One minor detail in the article does deserve further comment, however. I think Moses Zuckermandel (1836-1917) would have been enormously surprised by Rabbi Librach's enthusiastic tribute to the Tosefta scholarship of JTS's Saul Lieberman. Lieberman did not "discover" the Tosefta; Zuckermandel had already published this text, and it also can be found in the standard, Vilna edition of the Talmud. Long before Lieberman began to work on it, the problem of the document had been broadly discussed.

Nor did Lieberman do his best work on the Tosefta after he got to JTS in 1940. Lieberman's truly great contribution is *Tosefet Rishonim*, a masterpiece of his youth done while he was at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It was only when he did not get tenure there and was dismissed that he came to the U.S. Once here, he just recapitulated the prior work, but in huge dimensions.

JACOB NEUSNER
University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida

CLIFFORD E. LIBRACH writes:

Oh, dear. The institutional bureaucrats are upset. But is it not odd that the current president of the Rabbinical Assembly (RA), the association of Conservative rabbis, has, in the RA's newsletter, singled out my article for attention and asked that the subject it discusses be made the focus of

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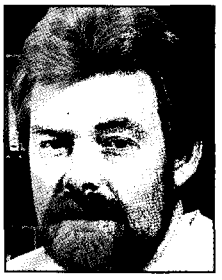

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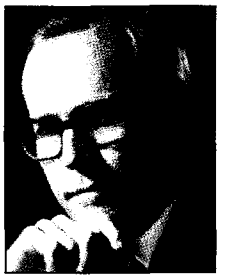

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Winter 1998/99

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continuing professional review and debate? Could it be that the workers in the field know the ground better than the publicists in the mansion?

Let me try to deal with my critics *seriatim*. While it is true, as Karen R. Klestzick notes, that the Conservative movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards is technically an arm of the RA and not of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), at least 20 percent of its membership must be drawn from the JTS faculty. Moreover, it is obvious, at least to me, that JTS is the center of Conservative Judaism, playing a role in setting its agenda and articulating its direction that is more prominent than the role played, say, by Hebrew Union College in the Reform movement. In any case, how these and other nits render my views on the Conservative movement and its future "fatally flawed" is beyond me.

Elliot N. Dorff admonishes that he is generally to be found at the center of the Conservative movement. But my point was, precisely, that such a status is relative. The "center" of the Democratic party has certainly moved some distance to the Left over the past 40 years, a shift to which any number of Democratic politicians can attest. So it is, I say, with Conservative Judaism (and, *inter alia*, other Judaisms as well).

As it happens, I have long admired Rabbi Dorff's prodigious work in Jewish law and find his contributions—even those with which I may disagree—filled with erudition and insight. But his attempted sociological comparison of Reform and Conservative Judaism strikes me as thin and largely anecdotal, based, perhaps, on his observations in Southern California. As one who has recently led prayer services entirely in Hebrew using *Gates of Prayer*, the Reform prayer book, and who has also attended Conservative worship services in which considerably less than 95 percent of the prayers were recited in Hebrew, I can match him anecdote for anecdote.

Yes, there are differences between the Conservative and Reform movements. There are also differences within them, from synagogue to synagogue. That said, I am comfortable in restating my conviction that many, if not most, members of Conservative and Reform synagogues are undergoing a structurally similar moment of confusion and weakness and are posing similar challenges to their rabbis—whose own responses are becoming, as well, more and more similar. Just recently, for example, the RA published its new *Rabbi's Manual*; it includes a *mi-she' beirakh* (a plea to God) to be recited in a "grieving ritual" after an abortion that, euphemism for euphemism, matches nicely the blessing "upon terminating a pregnancy" published by the Reform movement in 1994.

Alan Silverstein, who wrote a highly regarded doctoral dissertation on the history of Reform Judaism, knows as well as anyone that statistics and surveys are fraught with methodological peril, at best giving us a snapshot that can be manipulated to yield different interpretations. Suffice it to say that his reading of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey and the 1996 Ratner Center survey is highly idiosyncratic. At the time of their publication, moreover, each of these demographic studies was accompanied by far less sanguine assessments than Rabbi Silverstein's of the status and health of the Conservative movement.

This brings me to the estimable Steven Bayme, who charges me with "glibly predicting the dilution of Conservative Judaism" instead of praising those within it who are swimming against the tide in a courageous effort to sustain traditional Jewish values. Unfortunately, I suspect that had I written the article Mr. Bayme suggests I should

Azure

Ideas for the Jewish Nation

NO. 5 • AUTUMN 5759 / 1998

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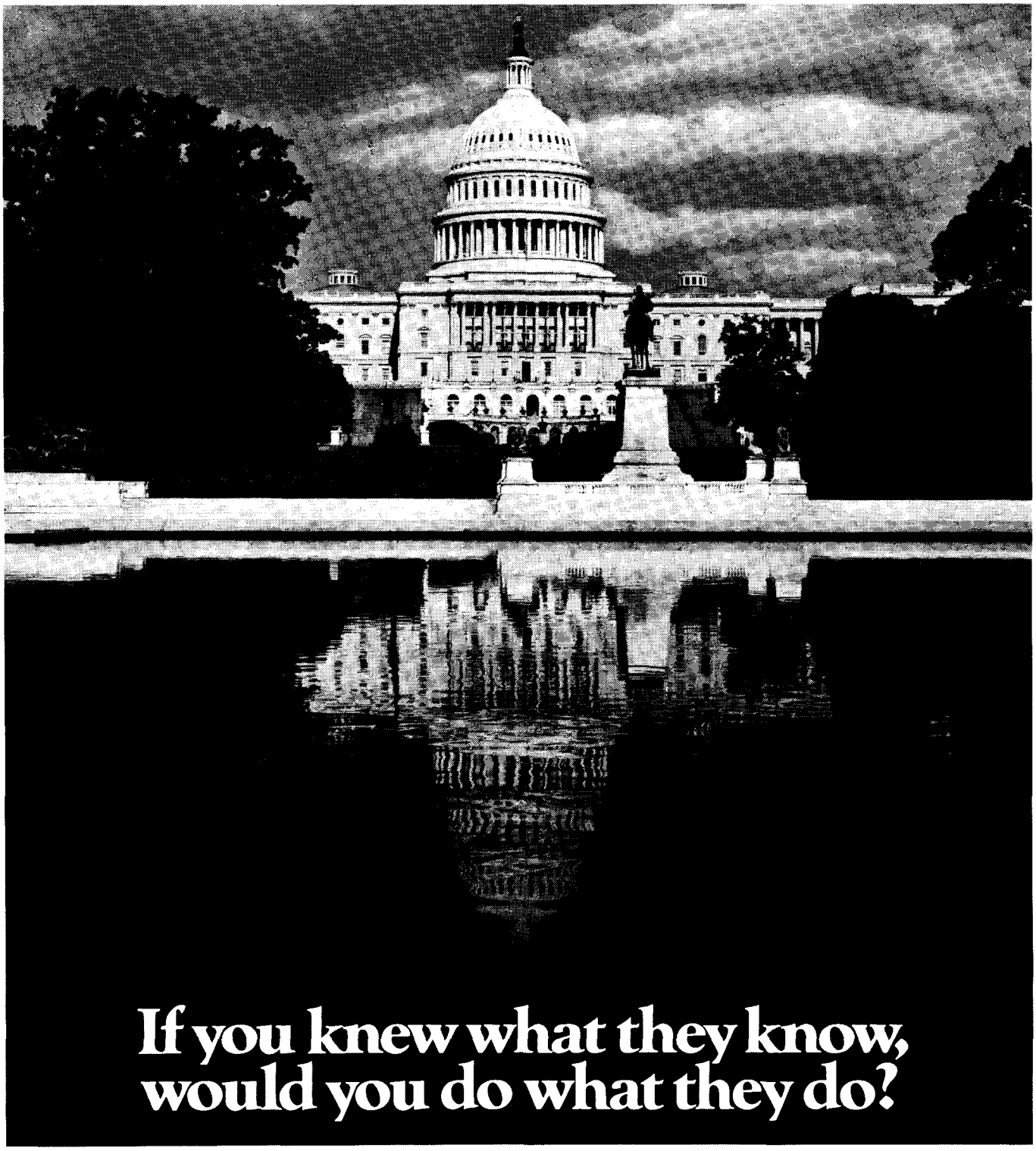

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have written, he or someone else would have called me not glib but naive—and he would have been right. Still, for his warm endorsement of my own attempts, within Reform Judaism, to help "preserve the Jewish future," I am most grateful.

Both David A. Teutsch and Steven M. Friedlander are to be commended for blowing their own horns. Others, however, may be permitted a less rosy view of the health of their respective institutions. The Academy for Jewish Religion, in particular, is mired in accreditation and placement problems that have been the central focus, if not the obsession, of its students and faculty for some time now. And as for the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, all I can say is that schools of osteopathic medicine are also "fully accredited institutions," and some of their graduates are excellent physicians.

Finally, to Melvin Farmelant and Lawrence I. Bonchek: it is time for a reality check. As to the former, there is an avalanche of data showing an increasingly alienated and hemorrhaging Reform movement. And, as to the latter, today's headlines offer endless examples of the cost to American society of the eclipse of religion. It is, of course, a truism that religious piety does not correspond directly to moral probity. But after Auschwitz and the Gulag Archipelago, I for one find it strange that there are still Jews who pine for the benefits of secular humanism, otherwise known as godless morality.

Many thanks to Donald Feldstein for his insight and to Jacob Neusner for his praise.

Philip Roth

TO THE EDITOR:

To his credit, Norman Podhoretz admits, in the opening paragraph of "The Adventures of Philip Roth" [October 1998], that he has always had "trouble" with Roth's smart-alecky tone. He is hardly alone in feeling this way, but he is also too sophisticated, too literary, to toss the usual brickbats. Instead, Mr. Podhoretz accuses Roth of not being willing (or perhaps, able) to abandon his youthful leftism and finally embrace the neoconservatism that would provide a subject, and an attitude, more commensurate with his considerable talents.

Much of this argument, as sharply written as it is entirely predictable, tells us more about Mr. Podhoretz than it does about Philip Roth. The piece ends with the hope that Roth may yet write significant fiction, but my instincts tell me that, so far as Mr. Podhoretz is concerned, Roth probably won't.

Meanwhile, Roth's latest novel, *I Married a Communist*, is what prompted Mr. Podhoretz's retrospective. The novel revisits cold-war fault lines in ways that give a human dimension to the ideological certitudes and orchestrated hysteria of the early 1950's. But in speculating about the novel as Roth's mean-spirited payback for his ex-wife Claire Bloom's memoir, *Leaving the Doll's House*, Mr. Podhoretz badly misses the book before his nose.

Perhaps it is enough that Philip Roth continues to let the chips of his research and feverish notes fall where they may. And if this means that Mr. Podhoretz's "thing" about Roth is destined to continue, so be it.

SANFORD PINSKER
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

I found Norman Podhoretz's article not only instructive but amazingly comprehensive, considering all that Philip Roth has written. But Roth's varied output, in genre as well as in tone, particularly his recent kinder and gentler treatment of the world he grew up in (as seen in both *American Pastoral* and *I Married a Communist*) can perhaps be attributed to something much more straightforward than complex political or social changes, or even changes in the heart and soul of Roth himself. The

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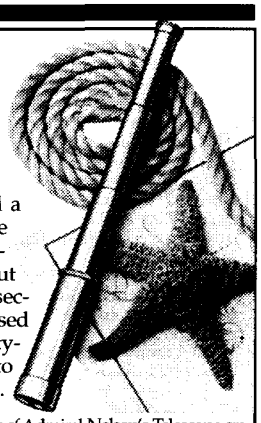

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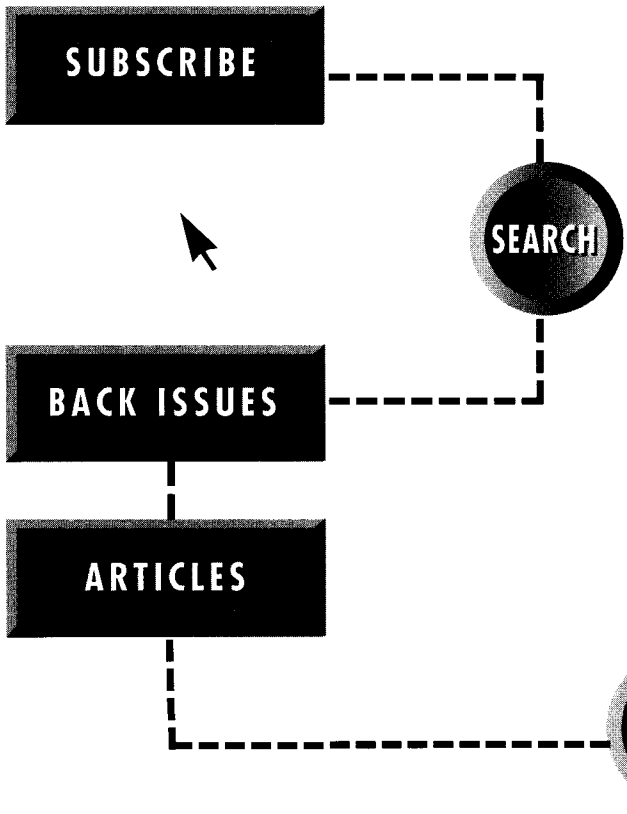

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new Roth who, as Mr. Podhoretz notes, "has now changed sides in the distribution of his scorn and his sympathies," may simply be the result of Roth's sense that if he were to continue in his old ways—the wearisome mazes of the earlier Zuckerman novels or the vulgar rantings of *Sabbath's Theater*—his readers as well as his reputation would suffer. In short, Philip Roth's latest change—adaptation, in fact, has been a constant throughout his career—may be nothing more than an understandable, even admirable, attempt to market his books and his reputation—and maybe win the Nobel Prize after all.

EARL L. DACHSLAGER
The Woodlands, Texas

TO THE EDITOR:

I did not know until I read Norman Podhoretz's article that Claire Bloom had threatened to sue Philip Roth to have her name removed from *Deception*. This might explain what I considered an enigmatic remark Roth made in a brief exchange we had when *Patrimony*, his memoir of his father, appeared. My younger son was upset that my father, Max Shipman, a frequent companion of Philip's father Herman in his last years—they lived in the same apartment house and often double-dated—became "Abe" in the book. It seemed to my son, and to me, too, that by changing my father's name, Roth was somehow denying that he actually existed. I wrote Philip a note about this, to which he replied in effect that I "knew" why he had not used my father's real name. At the time I did *not* know, but now I can hazard a guess that after Claire Bloom's threatened lawsuit, Roth was afraid that anyone whose real name he used in a book might end up telephoning a lawyer.

Incidentally, I trust I am not the first correspondent to note that Weequahic is misspelled in the article. Let me also point out that when I was growing up there we always called it a "section," not a neighborhood, as Mr. Podhoretz has it.

JEROME SHIPMAN
Potomac, Maryland

NORMAN PODHORETZ writes:

In finding my article "predictable," Sanford Pinsker is as presumptuous as he is wrong. I myself did not foresee, and could not have predicted, where I would come out in attempting an overview of Philip Roth's entire career and my own response to it. The moral, social, and political contexts out of which he has written his books have changed over the years, and he has changed along with them (as I have, too). But reluctant though I am to disagree with Earl L. Dachslager, who is so generous toward me, the changes Roth has undergone do not mean that he has merely been catering to his audience in order to sell books and win prizes. And neither does it mean, as Mr. Pinsker says, that Roth has just been letting the chips fall where they may. Indeed, I can hardly think of a more inappropriate image to use of so carefully controlling a writer as Roth. (Let me hasten to add that in thus characterizing him, my intention is analytic and not disparaging.)

Finally, among the other things about which Mr. Pinsker is wrong is that I am destined to be disappointed in the hopes aroused in me by *American Pastoral* and some of the works leading up to it. As I tried to make clear, though evidently in vain so far as Mr. Pinsker is concerned, these hopes were based not on politics, but on what I perceived as a broadening and deepening of Roth's formerly constricted sympathies. Nevertheless, on the evidence of *American Pastoral* alone, there could be no denying that this salutary novelistic (or, if you like, aesthetic) development emerged at least partly out of a reexamination of the leftist attitudes with which he grew up. Conversely, the regression to mean-spiritedness in *I Married a Communist* seems to me to have been caused—again at least partly, the other part having to

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do with a need to get back at Claire Bloom's memoir—by a relapse into those old attitudes. In any event, when I ended my article with the statement that "perhaps the best is yet to come from Philip Roth," I was perfectly sincere. Not being as prescient as Mr. Pinsker, however, I cannot predict what Roth's work in the future will look like and how it will strike me.

Jerome Shipman is right in thinking that he was not the only correspondent to have pointed out that I misspelled Weequahic. For this I apologize, though I see nothing wrong in having called it a neighborhood rather than a section. Brownsville in Brooklyn, where I grew up, was also called a section, which did not prevent it from being a neighborhood. I should also say that I would guess, if only from the tone of Roth's reply to the question of why he changed Mr. Shipman's father's name in *Patrimony*, that something other than legal considerations may have been involved.

Private Ryan

TO THE EDITOR:

In reading Christopher Caldwell's well-reasoned discussion of *Saving Private Ryan* ["Spielberg at War," October 1998], I was taken aback by his last sentence, in which he questions whether Steven Spielberg would have fought in World War II. I find this beneath contempt. Mr. Caldwell's argument goes something like this: as a Jewish intellectual, a pro-choice supporter of liberal and feminist causes, and a Clinton supporter, Steven Spielberg would have found some way to duck his duty and not serve in the war. Isn't this going a little too far?

And to quibble about Ryan's ordinariness in the "framing" segments at the beginning and end of the film, as Mr. Caldwell does, is to miss the point. The patrol is not sent to save Private Ryan, but to save Private Ryan's mother from losing her last son. This difference is what raises the stakes to a higher level.

And Mr. Caldwell's further complaint that *Saving Private Ryan* does not provide any explanation of why the men were fighting—"Ike-with-a-pointer"—misses something else. Stephen Ambrose, who was the adviser on the film, wrote a series of books on the war based on interviews with the young men who actually did the fighting. Their experiences forced him to conclude that occasionally some of the leadership was "criminally stupid." His sympathy and respect for what the GI's and young officers had to endure informs his books, and Spielberg's movie.

[LT. COL.] GEORGE B. BERKE

Reston, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

Christopher Caldwell's otherwise balanced and insightful article is marred by some class snobbery more suited to *Vanity Fair* than to COMMENTARY.

Mr. Caldwell puts down the young Ryan as "so thick he does not even know what the word 'context' means." This, of a teenage Iowa farmboy in 1944! And Ryan 50 years later gets even harsher treatment: "As an old man, he is a thoroughly tacky and undistinguished-looking American tourist in a polyester windbreaker." This is how Mr. Caldwell describes the aged Ryan in the incredibly moving scene at the Normandy military cemetery where, accompanied by his wife, children, and grandchildren, he had gone to find the grave of the officer who had saved his life. Would Mr. Caldwell have found the scene more palatable if Ryan had worn a Ralph Lauren jacket?

ERIC JULBER

Carmel, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Christopher Caldwell is right on target in his generational analysis of *Saving Private Ryan*. Admittedly, I am a baby boomer, and tend to see the world through this lens, but I think the generational angle is at the heart of what the movie is "about." In my view, Steven Spielberg adroitly managed to combine the level of violence that today's audiences expect with a nostalgia for the war movies of their youth and a growing recognition that their fathers' generation was never sufficiently honored.

I also agree with Mr. Caldwell that the movie is not anti-war, at least as that term has come to be defined. There is no question that Spielberg intended to show that war is hell, but I do not think he had in mind the meaningless hell that has been the fashion in war movies for the past 30 years. In fact, 30 years ago—the late 60's—serves as a nice watershed in a number of ways. It was in that era that Arthur Penn and Sam Peckinpah raised the violence ante dramatically in films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *The Wild Bunch* (1969). That period also serves as a demarcation point between films that deal with war as an occasion for heroism (pre) and films that deal with war as an occasion for moral equivalence and existential *angst* (post). War films before this time allowed for heroes but no blood, while more recent films have allowed for blood but no heroes. So one of the things that I found remarkable about *Saving Private Ryan* is that Spielberg forced both blood and heroism on the audience.

I am tempted to say that for a self-identified Hollywood liberal to depart from

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the view of war promoted by his 70's classmates like Francis Ford Coppola and Brian DePalma is a gutsy move. But I suspect Spielberg knows that his audience is changing, so his film, however heartfelt, is also pretty damn shrewd. Brilliant, too.

JEFFREY APFEL
Barrington, Rhode Island

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL writes:

I wish George B. Berke would go back and read my article more carefully. While I do say that *Saving Private Ryan* loses something by not putting the fighting in context, I also say that the film gains in suspense and immediacy by keeping such context offscreen. Nor do I quibble with Ryan's "ordinariness" (or with his cheap wardrobe, as Eric Julber would see if he too looked more closely at what I wrote). In fact, I argue that Ryan's commonness is what gives the film much of its moral complexity. Finally, if I had said that Spielberg would have dodged World War II because he is a Jewish liberal, I would indeed have gone "a little too far," but it is not a claim I made anywhere in the piece.

Let me thank Jeffrey Apfel for his interesting letter, though I am not sure I agree with his last point that Spielberg came up with his inspiration for the film on such cynical grounds.

Cardozo

TO THE EDITOR:

Contained within Daniel J. Silver's review of Andrew L. Kaufman's *Cardozo* [Books in Review, October 1998] is a seriously flawed philippic targeting (1) liberal activists eager to bend the law to political ends; (2) those in the legal profession who still look to the federal government and to the federal courts to heal all our ills; (3) judges who think nothing of overturning democratic majorities in the name of newly-invented rights; and (4) freewheeling feminist, deconstructionist, and critical-race theorists in our law schools. Mr. Silver fails to identify his targets by name and, more importantly, fails to explain why their jurisprudential views disqualify them from claiming to act in the tradition of Cardozo's philosophy, which as Mr. Silver puts it, "looked beyond the formal properties of the law to the impact of the legal system on society at large."

As Chief Judge Richard Posner of the Court of Appeals explained in his 1989 Cooley Lecture at the University of Michigan Law School (published under the title *Cardozo: A Study in Reputation*), an "important factor in Cardozo's eminence may well be his judicial program, clearly stated in *The Nature of the Judicial Process*, of bringing law closer to the informed nonlawyers' sense of justice. . . ." Posner went on to observe that "the best judges, however, recognizing both the inherent and the contingent shortcomings of the legislative process, have wanted to change the law and have succeeded in doing so."

Were Cardozo with us today, I seriously doubt that he would join in Mr. Silver's criticism. It is more likely that he would understand that as the years progress, the nonlawyers' sense of justice cuts deeper and wider than in the years Cardozo sat as a judge, and urge that we continue to struggle to meet, in Mr. Silver's words, "the urgently felt needs of the nation, especially in light of the Constitution's declared purpose to promote the 'general welfare.'"

[JUDGE] AVERN COHN
United States District Court
Eastern District of Michigan
Detroit, Michigan

DANIEL J. SILVER writes:

Avern Cohn challenges me to explain why the values of anti-majoritarian liberal activists, judicial legislators, and academic radicals cannot now be compared with Cardozo's moderate reformism. I am happy to oblige, but to save space, I will offer only one illustration, from a recent Supreme Court ruling.

Consider the Court's decision to overturn a referendum passed by the people of Colorado that would have prohibited that state's towns and cities from enacting measures giving preferential treatment to homosexuals. Despite the obvious intent of the referendum's language to conform to Supreme Court precedent, the Court's majority chose to construe the referendum itself as a hostile attack on gays. Would Cardozo have approved? As to views of the Court's majority, probably yes, at least if we assume, as seems likely, that Cardozo's sensibilities would have been updated to the prevailing attitudes of today's liberal elites. But as to the Court's decision—almost surely not. Cardozo would have been dismayed by the majority's contemptuous flouting of popular will and its jury-rigging of constitutional doctrine to get the desired result. Cardozo would never have taken legal "realism" this far.

Judge Cohn cites Richard Posner on Cardozo's judicial program of "bringing law closer to the informed nonlawyers' sense of justice," which might mean "chang[ing] the law" to correct "shortcomings" in the legislative process. That Cardozo wrote eloquently and creatively about the "gap-filling" role of judges is clear; but he never called for judges to *replace* legislative judgment where it was clearly expressed. While decrying the extreme formalism of older notions of the judicial function that relied on abstract rules devoid of social meaning, Cardozo still insisted that judges' creativity be strictly circumscribed: "[Judges] must keep within those interstitial limits which precedent and custom and the long and silent and almost indefinable practice of other judges through the centuries of the common law have set to judge-made innovations."

But what I find the most disturbing aspect of Judge Cohn's letter is the implication that "the nonlawyers' sense of justice" inevitably corresponds to that of liberal activists and radicals. Cardozo may have been a social liberal, but he would not have agreed that a judge's principal duty is to give force to values held by the most marginal representatives of the community.

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Commentary
January 1999

Clinton, the Country, and the Political Culture

A Symposium

To help clarify opinion on the implications of the present moment, the editors recently addressed the following questions to a group of distinguished writers:

1. Read as a barometer of the national temper, the election results of November 3 seemed to confirm that the American electorate, despite its low opinion of President Clinton's personal behavior, was not persuaded he had committed offenses warranting removal from office and was impatient with those—i.e., Republicans—who thought otherwise. Whatever your position may be in the matter of impeachment, how do you interpret the strength shown by the Democrats in the midterm elections, and what else do the returns suggest to you about the political mood of the moment?

2. The decidedly mixed reaction to the Starr investigation and report, and the President's continued popularity, have raised large questions about the moral disposition of the American people. Some, notably William J. Bennett, have suggested that we are witnessing the results of a progressive enfeeblement; others have posited a healthy disinclination to expose and/or criminalize private behavior; still others point to a general disgust with the political arena altogether and a consequent desire simply to be shut of the latest Washington scandal. Do you agree with any of these interpretations? What is your own sense of where, on moral matters, the public stands? Should stand?

3. It has been widely asserted that American conservatism in general and conservative intellectuals in particular have been taken over by a neo-Puritan zeal that extends far beyond the present case and will settle for nothing less than a radical curtailment of precious and hard-won freedoms, especially in the realm of sexual behavior. Do you find any merit in this charge? Where, to your mind, is American conservatism now going, and what are the issues and the perils it faces?

The responses, seventeen in all, are printed below in alphabetical order.

This symposium is sponsored by the Edwin Morris Gale Memorial Fund.

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Robert L. Bartley

Is BILL CLINTON, with all his superficial virtues and awesome vices, the authentic representation of the society that elected him? What does *his* morality say about *ours*?

The questions are surely fair enough in the wake of the 1998 elections, and the failure of the electorate to punish Clinton's party for his confessed sins comes after several years of debate over the moral direction of the country. Are we becoming a society of libertines, as suggested by, say, the prevalence of premarital cohabitation? Or are we in the early stages of a moral and religious revival, as suggested by the rise of evangelical religion and a more widespread debate over morals?

While a case seems to be building against the electorate, my practice has always been to give it the benefit of the doubt, to ask what the political market is telling us. I like to think this bias is rooted in history and experience; without the election of Jimmy Carter, for example, we never would have had Ronald Reagan. I think it particularly unfair to blame the electorate for failing to answer questions it has never been asked. Framing the issues being put to a vote is the job of elites, and if they fail in this task they have no complaint against ordinary voters.

In 1998 the Republican strategy was to run out the clock. GOP strategists assumed that historical patterns and the existence of an independent counsel relieved them of any need to elaborate Clinton's failings. Trying to get out of town, they consented to a budget deal busting most of the principles they had articulated in their 1994 victory. Then, in the last few days of the campaign, panicked by the disaffection of voters who had believed in those principles, they sought to "mobilize the base" with a few scandal commercials. The effect was never to present the issue to voters effectively, only enough to allow Clinton supporters to claim it had been rejected.

This kind of mistake is somehow baked into Republicans' genes. They lost the Senate with an issueless campaign in 1986. In 1992, George Bush, with 80-plus approval ratings, thought he could run out the clock without muddying himself with Bill Clinton. Bob Dole, a consummate creature of the Beltway, was hardly the candidate to find the needed populist theme in 1996. While Newt Gingrich never recovered from setting himself up to take the blame when Bill Clinton's veto closed the government in 1995, he remains remarkable in having struck the theme in the first place in 1994. More usually, the GOP takes calculated risks only when led by former Democrats—Ronald Reagan or Henry Hyde.

Republican politicians are particularly uncomfortable with the role history has thrust upon them: the party of ideas in an era defined by the exhaustion of the New Deal and the defeat of Communism. They will never be able to build enough highways or subsidize enough shipping firms to compete with Democratic payoffs to labor unions or trial lawyers. They can succeed only by articulating issues, by courting disagreement, by "polarizing" voters. This is, to be sure, not a game for tin ears.

All the more so given the bent of the media, always anxious to magnify any Republican or conservative downside with a vigor it seldom applies to Democrats or liberals. To take the salient example, the press has not really been soft on Bill Clinton, but in a similar situation a Republican President would have been hounded from office long ago. Indeed, at the end of the day what will need to be explained is what Watergate was all about.

Some of the blame for Republican failures rests with conservative intellectuals, especially for dabbling in political tactics. The Beltway division advised Republicans that getting out of town was "worth a few billions." The nativist division decimated the GOP in California, our largest state. Intellectuals on the religious Right, even or rather especially those who have never demonstrated any punch at the polls, know that they can get media attention, and build donor lists, by complaining about being ignored. The saving grace of 1998 may be a chance to build consensus in 2000. The two financially plausible presidential candidates, George W. Bush and Steve Forbes, each in his way represents an inclusive and optimistic fusion of economic and cultural conservatism.

The two wings of conservatism need each other, politically and intellectually. As a spokesman for economic ideas, let me say it would be a tragedy to write off the religious Right. Politically, its mainstream, which is to say the Christian Coalition, is a sophisticated and pragmatic force—for example, ending the Patrick J. Buchanan challenge by forging a victory for Bob Dole in the 1996 South Carolina primary. Intellectually, economic experience and development research are increasingly stressing that free markets rest on the rule of

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law, which in turn rests on moral foundations that need protection and regeneration.

AS FOR the future, we seem to be tottering at a political tipping-point. Hillary Clinton's health-care debacle was probably the last gasp of big-government liberalism. In the recent campaign, even Charles Schumer, now the Senator-elect from New York, denied he was a "liberal." In historical terms, the function of the Clinton presidency has been to ratify Reaganism, as Eisenhower ratified the New Deal. And for all their mistakes, Republicans do hold a congressional majority for the first time in four decades.

Despite this generally conservative tide, stealth liberalism proceeds. Taxes are at record peacetime highs, Hillarycare returns as HMO "reform," and "saving" Social Security may become an excuse for a huge increase in taxes on our most productive citizens. Disgust with politics mounts, with the good citizens of Minnesota picking a professional wrestler over professional politicians.

With these cross-tides running, we may be particularly vulnerable to historical accident. Much of our politics was shaped when John F. Kennedy, Clinton's idol, was martyred by an assassin's bullet three weeks after he blundered into Vietnam by sanctioning the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem. Watergate, similarly, led to the budget act of 1974, with profound effects on both economics and the political balance of power.

Without knowing what events will hold, I doubt that the issue of Clintonesque morality will go away easily, or that the Democratic party can long thrive on stealth liberalism. The task for conservatives is to persuade Republicans to be bolder and smarter in articulating issues. The lesson of 1998 is that to persuade the electorate of something, you have to believe it yourself, and act as if you do.

ROBERT L. BARTLEY *is the editor of the* Wall Street Journal.

William J. Bennett

THE RESULTS of the November elections reveal public indifference and Republican diffidence. It is by now common wisdom that the public is deeply apathetic toward, and increasingly cynical about, politics. It does not much like or respect politicians, and it is tuning out and turning away. (Voter turnout was the lowest in more than a half-century.) Still, as between the parties, the Democrats, though at a severe financial disadvantage, were able to muster more of their core constituency than the Republicans. Although everyone knew the high stakes in this election (i.e., the impeachment of the President), most Republicans stayed away from the voting booth.

A second lesson takes the form of an old adage: you can't beat something with nothing. A few months before the election, the Republican party made a calculated decision to run away from a substantive debate about important policy matters. Fearful of tangling with a wounded but talented President, still skittish because of the 1995 government shutdown, lacking confidence in a bold, conservative reform agenda, and confident that a midterm election held in the President's second term would do their work for them, Republicans decided to "play it safe." I have long said that politics is like a football game: you're either on offense or you're on defense. The Republicans self-consciously decided to play defense, and they paid for it. The GOP was afraid of standing for principle and losing, so it stood for nothing—and lost.

A third lesson is that what public-opinion polls were indicating for ten months was right: by a wide majority, the American people do not want President Clinton impeached and convicted. Of course, the election was not *simply* a referendum on impeachment; the impeachment issue, indeed, was pretty much of a nonfactor in most House and Senate races. But clearly this was the best opportunity the public had to express its disapproval of the President's massive web of deceit. Most Americans chose not to utilize that opportunity, which is itself instructive.

AS FOR the moral disposition of the American people, one must begin with this stipulation: America is a large, diverse, and culturally divided country. It is always unwise to draw sweeping conclusions about "the American people." For example, a significant part of the population—one-third or so—is deeply troubled by the President's utter contempt for the rule of law and for truth. That said, it is clear that much—and maybe even most—of the public has become *extremely* latitudinarian on sexual matters.

The Lewinsky scandal demonstrates that, so

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long as sexual misconduct is seen as the underlying issue, most Americans are willing to dismiss overwhelming evidence of criminal activity. They agree with Charles Schumer, who conceded that, yes, the President did commit perjury before a federal grand jury, but it does not matter because, well, he was lying about adultery. Most Americans apparently believe that crimes committed in the name of adultery are no longer crimes.

Add to this the fact that even as clear evidence of perjury and obstruction of justice was presented, Clinton's job-approval rating went *up*. For over a half-year, commentators in the press, liberal as well as conservative, assured us that once the real story got out, the Clinton presidency would be over. The public would repudiate him. Instead, President Clinton, clearly guilty of having committed multiple felony crimes, reached a high-water mark in public approval.

What this suggests is that the Lewinsky scandal is not an aberration but part of a broader trend. In *One Nation, After All*, the sociologist Alan Wolfe carefully documented the moral disposition of middle-class Americans. In comments made earlier this year Wolfe—no conservative, he—admitted that "the single most surprising finding that I came up with is how unbelievably relativistic Americans are." Yes, so it appears they are.

But that brings us finally to the nonrelativistic conservatives, the ones supposedly being taken over by "neo-Puritan zeal." This charge, it is worth keeping in mind, has been leveled against people who hold the following "controversial" positions: in favor of life, against homosexual marriage, troubled by presidential adultery with interns and by presidential perjury. Is it not a further indication of the relativistic times in which we live that holding reasoned convictions on such matters should elicit such shrill alarm? But there is little help for that, other than to carry on with the necessary work and to try to persuade others by the power and moral appeal of certain well-established ideas.

There are plenty of opportunities for conservatives to make gains—by, for example, becoming the agents of reform on education, crime, racial quotas, welfare, taxes, Social Security, and missile defense. A conservative reform agenda can indeed have great appeal (as a number of GOP governors have shown). But conservatives should not kid themselves, either. With Alan Wolfe's comments in mind, the challenge, or perhaps peril, of the moment is to state not simply what conservatives stand for but what they stand against: moral rot, decadence, relativism disguised as sophistication, "enlightened" liberalism. In modern-day America this may not be easy, but it is what decency and justice, and the times, demand.

WILLIAM J. BENNETT *is a co-director of Empower America, a fellow at the Heritage Foundation, and the author of* The Death of Outrage: Bill Clinton and the Assault on American Ideals *(Free Press).*

William F. Buckley, Jr.

THE ELECTION returns—as I read them—did not mean anything decisive, with this exception: that there was no appetite to pursue President Clinton into immediate retirement. The relatively strong hand of Democratic votes tells us, mostly, that there was the normal confusion deriving from an incumbent Congress that was GOP with a Democratic President, but that all in all there was no keen appetite to grumble over the activity or inactivity of the incumbents. And I think we could see a feeling among those sensitive on the matter of Clinton that he had been punished enough by the publicity and humiliation. The election returns sounded to me like an ode to self-satisfaction.

Still, though it is tiresome to repeat it, those of us terminally committed to the correctness of impeachment have to say it: a President was the principal enforcer of the laws and this President flouted those laws. What crystallized, in the period since the November elections, was a national indisposition to forward impeachment proceedings except formalistically. By early December the eschatological dynamic of the Judiciary Committee's inquiry was gone, and it seemed the House would go no further than to inveigh against what Clinton did, without reasoning that what he did disqualified him, in an orderly world, from continuing in office.

That—little chance of impeachment, no chance of conviction—was the reason for curiosity about what else might be done to register formal legislative concerns. For a while, everyone spoke of censure; but the dawning light told us that a censure motion would be extra-constitutional. Senator Arlen Specter recommended doing nothing;

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he recommended waiting, with justice in the back of the eye, until after Clinton leaves office, and ushering him then into the maws of the conventional justice system. If that is the direction decided upon, an indictment, so to speak post-dated, could be drawn up outlining his felonies—to be given to the grand jury in January 2001.

Both opponents of impeachment and advocates of it have argued the danger of precedents. Might a precedent be set that would encourage fitful removals of a President? On the other hand, might a precedent be set that a President can get away with very nearly anything? The relative inertia of the public confirms William J. Bennett's reading, that there is a progressive enfeeblement of ethical will.

The political results also suggest degrees of sophistication. There are those who believe that nothing will be done, so you may just as well not go through the motions. There are others who believe that it is unwise to pursue convulsive remedies, on the grounds that general upheaval is too high a price to pay, not for Clinton but for the country. The stock-market plunge in October was widely thought to be an augury of the commotion that would attend an impeachment and conviction.

But, *pace* Bill Bennett, the majority (73-24) do rate Clinton unethical, and curiosity naturally leads one to ask: how offensive *is* it to act unethically? The public opiate here is that unethical conduct vis-à-vis sex is nothing to write home about, that this, really, is what Clinton has been up to, and that Thomas Jefferson did it and lied about it, too.

But that leads to another question: how alarming, if at all, is the accommodationist direction in public attitudes toward immoral behavior? My own view is that libertinism is especially to be regretted when formally ignored. A society is surely healthier when whoring is common but commonly disapproved of than when it is common and commonly accepted. Self-discipline is the anchor of civilized behavior, which is why wedding "vows" are exchanged, and "oaths" of office taken.

WHAT IS new in the current anxiety over Puritanical recidivism is anxiety over the matters of abortion and gay sex. The animated concern over the Christian Right and the threat it poses has got to trace to the primary differences in public standards 50 years ago and today on these two issues. The right to choose is now held to be sacrosanct by many, and the gay movement marches toward new advance positions, gay marriage being just over the horizon. Conservatives who oppose the expansion of gay rights to the point of subverting natural liaisons are thought backward in the march of civil rights toward final fulfillment.

It is probably correct that conservatives oppose more vociferously, and resist more obdurately, certain social trends; but it does not follow that this is so because they have set their sights on angelism. It is a burden of conservatives to resist changes that, on reflection, should be resisted by everybody.

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR. *is editor-at-large of* National Review *and host of* Firing Line. *His forthcoming novel,* Redhunter, *is based on the life of Joseph McCarthy.*

Christopher Caldwell

LIKE MOST elections, the last one turned not on the winning party's strength but on the losing party's weakness. Nothing remains of Reagan-era ideology that can win elections for Republicans in the late 1990's—particularly in an electorate that focuses on domestic policy.

Reagan's low-tax regime achieved two popular things that no longer do the GOP much good. First, it revealed that high tax rates are not optimal tax rates—but this lesson stopped providing an advantage to conservatives once left-wing parties all over the world learned it. Second, Reaganism reduced the say of government in citizens' day-to-day lives—but Republicans themselves, despite rhetoric to the contrary, abandoned that project after the government shutdown of 1995. The most egregious example from the last Congress was Republican cooperation with the Democrats' statist tobacco schemes; the most recent example is the bloated 1999 budget. If a desire for smaller, less intrusive government is at the center of conservatism, then the United States does not at present have a conservative party.

One assumed Republicans knew what they were doing in making peace with statism. November's surprisingly strong showing of libertarian issues and candidates indicates they did not. Jesse Ventura's victory in the Minnesota gubernatorial race was remarkable not just for his Reform-party affiliation; Ventura even bantered about legalizing prostitution. Voters legalized

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medical marijuana in every state where it was on the ballot. They voted to overturn affirmative action in the state of Washington.

A libertarian electoral climate is a bad one in which to try to impeach a President either for an office affair or for hiding an office affair from the law. (Republicans were never clear about which exercised them the more; either way, history will laugh at them.) But it is still not clear at first sight why the Lewinsky affair should have harmed Republicans at the polls. True, they abandoned their opposition to sexual-harassment law and the independent counsel when it suited their purposes. But Democrats were guilty of a symmetrical hypocrisy throughout the scandal, decrying the "partisanship" they themselves had pioneered in the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings and the "sexual witch hunts" they had passed legislation to promote.

WHY, IF militant prudery afflicts both parties equally, do Republicans suffer more? Because there has always been something preposterous about Democrats—the party of gays and single mothers—standing as enforcers of sexual morality. Certain Republicans, on the other hand, have coherently and forcefully articulated the case for a rollback of the whole sexual legacy of the 1960's, starting with legalized abortion.

Abortion has been a linchpin of the American Way for decades now. It underwrites not just the sexual hedonism that has become an unenumerated right in the social contract but also the mobility and personal autonomy on which the whole labor market rests. Even if the pro-life position is more in tune with the wisdom of the ages, it is an "extremist" one for the purposes of this society. For abortion cannot now be banned without shaking society to its foundations. On abortion, if the Republican party is not extremist, then it is objectively pro-choice. Like those old European socialist parties whose charters proclaimed common ownership of property and loyalty to the Soviet Union, it wins votes only to the extent that its platform is disbelieved or its goals are viewed as unattainable.

When Republicans debate abortion on grounds of life (the child), they can break even. When they debate it on grounds of sex (the woman), they lose overwhelmingly—because the synaptic connections between "reproductive rights" and every other corner of modern society begin firing in the collective mind. That is why the Lewinsky affair proved such a catastrophe. In shifting the grounds of debate to sex, it highlighted the ways in which Republicans could be branded as sworn enemies of the established social order. That spelled electoral disaster, much as Soviet troop movements (to pick up our metaphor again) did for European labor parties during the cold war.

Two other factors worsened the situation. First, the *Penthouse Forum* tone of the Starr report and of much anti-Clinton commentary cast Republicans as the party that *really* likes to talk about sex. To get caught masturbating into the Oval Office sink is humiliating; to spend a year turning blue in the face about it is perverse. Second, Republicans appeared opportunistic in adducing a "moral crisis" or a "death of outrage" to explain the public's refusal to desert the President over the Lewinsky matter. Any index that measures our moral state objectively rather than rhetorically—illegitimacy rates, divorce rates, murder rates, even abortion rates—shows a marked improvement over the last decade. If Republicans were so unwilling to take "yes" for an answer, then their moral complaint must be not with recent developments but with the whole present-day structure of society.

So the Republican party's focus on sex revealed it for what it in fact is: an umbrella organization for those who feel the country is the worse off for the reforms of the past three decades, the loser party of post-1960's America.

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL *is senior writer at the* Weekly Standard.

Midge Decter

"WHEREIN IS a man like a shoemaker?" asked Sholem Aleichem, and answered, "A shoemaker lives and lives and lives until he dies, and so does a man." In response to COMMENTARY's query, we might ask, "Wherein is a voter like a man?" and answer, "A man dreams of having all of the world's goodies at no cost, and so does a voter."

This is true whether that voter is male or female, young or old, liberal or conservative. The old, for instance, want free medical care without any diminution in the quality of that care, while the young wish for the government to take the old people off their hands without any increase

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in taxes. Women want to be full competitors with men in the workplace without losing their special status as members of a protected species, while men would like to see their country well-protected from its enemies without their own sons being required to serve. Liberals would like to enjoy safe streets without having too many cops around, while conservatives deplore the heavy hand of government on just about everything but public morals—and there they hope for a heavy hand indeed.

That is how we are to understand the election of 1998: namely, it was an election of the voters. (By the way, it was certainly no victory for the Democrats, and it was a defeat for Republicans only in proportion to how much less well they did than they had trumpeted to themselves that they were going to do.) Politicians on both sides of the aisle, in their usual fashion, fell into confusion, for it is their responsibility to respond to what the voters want of them, and without some great national crisis the voters tend to be a body of people pulling in all directions at once.

Are we to assume, for instance, that Americans really prefer, as the presidential results of 1996 might suggest, to have a clever adolescent rogue in the White House? Considering the other figures whom they have favored with reelection—Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan—that hardly seems likely. The women who voted for Clinton—and not only voted for him but noisily "forgave" him for behaving in a manner that under other circumstances would have spurred them to get him fired from his job—were mainly protecting the right to easy and respectable abortion. His ever-loyal constituents in the black community seemed content with such tokens of presidential attention as a few erratic government appointments. For the rest, American electoral politics seems to be in a kind of silly season, in which everything and its opposite are on offer and votes fly around in all directions, signifying practically nothing.

As far as the President is concerned, his astronomical approval ratings in the very teeth of the primitive unattractiveness of his behavior may, as William J. Bennett fears, be a measure of the decadence that has eaten its way so far into American culture. But I am inclined to believe they are something else, something akin but not quite the same: namely, a declaration of longing to be spared the unbearably heavy responsibility of determining the country's future. There is, after all, no middle ground where Clinton is concerned: if you do not agree to cover for him, you have to dump him. Although dumping him is something the politicians would carry out, in the ensuing instability the ball would end up in the voters' court.

At the moment, they are not really prepared for that—not, as many experts say, because they are apathetic but because, living in so rich and free a country, they cannot decide what to ask the politicians for first. Meanwhile, Clinton promises to look tough, but of course not too tough, with the outside world, and gentle, but of course not too gentle, at home; and while people understand that it is all bunk, they are content to let it ride until something comes along that really moves them.

CHANCES ARE that when at last Americans really are moved to get serious, what will move them will have nothing to do with politics. For politics, by definition a method for keeping them engaged in the question of what they want, must provide them with a lot of contradictory and therefore unmanageable expectations. But what *will* bring Americans to their senses is a movement, or perhaps an institution, that speaks to them not of their desires but of their *needs*. This, in my opinion, is what they are just hanging around waiting to happen.

Where will such a movement or institution arise? Some people suggest that the churches will one day return from their wanderings in the wasteland of do-goodism and bring about the kind of regeneration that centuries ago took place in England under the leadership of John Wesley. Maybe so; but calling upon the churches, and going down on one's knees inside them, are two very different things. The first is simple, the second is serious business.

Might not at least some significant part of the necessary lesson be taught by the neoconservative intellectuals? After all, they themselves were once rescued from the rot by just such an epiphany as their fellow Americans are unconsciously waiting for, and in the process they brought a whole new population to the conservative intellectual community. Perhaps, then, it is they who could bring the word.

But in order for their voices to carry, some of the members of that community would have to be a whole lot more loving than they have lately been showing themselves to be—loving, that is, both of the country and of the people in it. Certainly the United States has become a depressing sexual and cultural shambles; but that is not all

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there is, not by a long shot. Lift from Americans the burden of a feeble self-involvement that the country's wealth and myth of endless possibility have placed upon their spirits, and watch them flower. And then watch the press, the television, the schools and universities, slavish dependents all on majority opinion, fall kicking and screaming into line.

MIDGE DECTER *is the author of* The Liberated Woman & Other Americans *and* Liberal Parents, Radical Children, *among other books.*

Jean Bethke Elshtain

THE POLITICAL mood of the country is as mixed as the election results. Voters last November refused to send a Big Message, either that all was well or, by contrast, that the country would be definitively on its way to hell unless Clinton was kicked out of office for his various twistings and turnings, carnal and legal. Most of the people I know paid little attention to the elections, and those who did stayed with the candidates who delivered the goods locally or who had not been in the news in ways that built up "negatives."

So the mood of the electorate is querulous, edgy, a bit scattershot. Nobody wants "extremists," but "extremists," nowadays, seem to be the people who, whatever their politics, are saying what you do not want to hear.

The elections aside, ever since the wretched Lewinsky business broke open I have been arguing that somehow Americans would have to come to grips with the radical disjuncture embodied in their schizophrenic assessments of the President: lying, untrustworthy, wouldn't want him to marry my daughter and, at the same time, effective, strong, doing a good job. But not only has this reckoning not taken place, it shows no sign of taking place. What this means is that the necessary debate about whether, and in what ways, the President of the United States should, while in office, be held to a certain threshold of behavior, and about what this minimal standard should be in the case of the officeholder above all officeholders in the country (the President is not just "our Bill," or Joe or Schmoe), may never come to pass. Instead, we will muddle through.

The problem is: the muddle has become nastier and nastier over the course of this scandal as all the President's men, in their zeal to protect him at all costs from any costs for his own misdeeds, have taken too many issues before too many courts for definitive adjudication (I think here of the many "privilege" claims). And the courts, having come down largely in Kenneth Starr's favor, may have overly rigidified and narrowed the range within which we believe Presidents, on the whole, should be permitted to operate without fear of sanction. In other words, future Presidents may pay the price for the current debacle.

As for where the American people stand on this matter, most, it seems to me, are both troubled and fed-up. The scenario seems to be: the President has admitted he "sinned" and it is now time to "forgive" him (his words). But forgiveness is not a get-home-free pass and never was. How did we lose a more robust sense of what forgiveness is and requires of us and others? To answer that, you would need to do a full-blown cultural analysis of the past half-century. Let me drop one hint. Against the backdrop of decades of cultural pop-psychologization—everything is what it is insofar as it is immediately accessible to, and useful for, me—and the consequent watering-down of our sense of what it means to think in terms of norms, rules, laws, or abiding truths, it is perhaps unsurprising that we should have come to this pass.

ANY DECENT constitutional society respects a distinction between public and private. If I thought the President's behavior was "private" I would be screaming louder than anyone else to lay off. But that is not what we are confronted with. One can hardly imagine a more public place than the White House in which to conduct a radically indiscreet affair, one that required the ministrations of a small army of staffers to facilitate and then to cover up. Since when did it become acceptable for the public-private distinction to be turned into a weapon wielded by the powerful or by anyone wishing to assert the right of the powerful to be untouchable in public if what they did is deemed private? And they, the powerful, get to decide what private is?

I thought the whole point of reasonable feminist protest against sexual harassment—there was a lot that was unreasonable, too—was to take on such claims and to defeat them. Why does Anita Hill's claim that Clarence Thomas told her risqué jokes lead to cries of denunciation, while Kathleen Willey's charge that she was physically

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groped by the President of the United States count for nothing? Now, of course, we have learned that if the offender is one of "ours," there is no harm done. Something like the return of *droit de seigneur* is represented as the epitome of nigh-Olympian wisdom and sophistication. To raise one's eyebrows over this hardly seems to me an example of "neo-Puritan zeal," whoever is doing the eyebrow-arching.

As someone who thinks of herself as a rather old-fashioned social liberal in dialogue with conservatism, I find the future of both conservatism and liberalism very much up for grabs at the moment. Will liberals rediscover the pluralism and capacity for coalition politics that was once their great strength? Will liberals and conservatives alike find a way through to policies that protect the weak from rapacities even as they keep intact the self-respect of those being helped? Is it really possible to have open political debate around a whole range of issues dear to the hearts of so many of our fellow citizens—including race and abortion, to name just two? Can a way be found to curb the excesses of the libertarian-econometric world view that dominates much conservative political rhetoric? (It dominates what passes for left-wing rhetoric, too, clad in the garb not of economic but of "personal" freedoms unleashed and pretty much unrestrained.)

So: neo-Puritan zeal, whatever the more frantic among us might think, is not our problem as a culture. What is a problem is the promotion, under both liberal and conservative banners, of a way of thinking that walls us off decisively from a consideration of commonalities and social goods and modes of thinking about them. That being so, it should not surprise us if, in the future, we are confronted with yet another defining moment and fail even more miserably to rise to the challenge.

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN *is the Laura Spelman Rockefeller professor of ethics at the University of Chicago and the author of* Democracy on Trial, *among other books.*

David Frum

CHIN UP! The American public's disinclination to remove President Clinton from office is in many ways a conservative impulse—a misguided conservative impulse, but conservative all the same. Just as Bill Clinton won in 1992 by, paradoxically, getting to the right of George Bush on welfare, so his party prevailed in 1998 by getting to the right of Kenneth Starr on the issue of public decency.

How so? Democratic congressional candidates seldom tried to deny the truth of the accusations in the Starr report. Except for a libertine few, they did not even minimize the accusations' gravity. What they argued, instead, was that it was time to get the smut off television—*and* that the way to get it off was by ending the investigation.

The Democrats gained five seats in an election in which they were expected to lose at least a dozen because crucial segments of the public were convinced by this "let's-move-on" line of argument. But that is precisely why it would be a mistake to conclude from the 1998 election that America is a nation of cheerful immoralists, 250 million Geraldos. It is, rather, a nation morally divided, in which the balance of power is held by embarrassed moralists, who do not like hearing the squalid details of wrongdoing, and whose tendency when confronted with behavior like Bill Clinton's is to look away rather than condemn. That tendency may be wrong, but it is surely not entirely blameworthy.

The public's apparent willingness to give politicians some latitude in their private life is not entirely blameworthy, either. The President's critics gamely argued on the television chat shows that the real issue was perjury, but the public would not or could not abstract the President's legal wrongdoing from its sexual context. That failure may indeed reflect the moral decay that William J. Bennett worries about. But it is also possible that it emerges not from amoralism but from a robust hostility to the feminist sex police who have patrolled American factories and offices over the past decade. The public may, in other words, support the President for many of the same reasons that led it to support Clarence Thomas in 1991.

OF COURSE it is dismaying that Clinton now seems likely to escape the ultimate punishment for his crimes. Whatever their motives, the American people are choosing to tolerate brazen defiance of the law by their President—a choice that leaves their Republic far wobblier than it was seven years ago. But I am not prepared to despair just yet either of the Republic or the people who constitute it.

The fact is, the President's critics proved their case and won the debate. A substantial majority of the American people now agree that Clinton

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has lied under oath. By large margins, they disapprove of his character and condemn him as a man who does not share their values. Where they disagree with the President's critics is not in their judgment of the man, but in their assessment of the appropriate penalty. They think removal from office is too draconian. That again, even though also wrong, is not an unconservative conclusion.

Nor is it a conclusion that should give any special comfort to the President's friends. The President may escape justice. I doubt very much that his apologists will. For eight months, the American public has listened to this administration's supporters make excuses for witness-tampering and conspiracy. For the quarter-century since Watergate, the Democrats were the party of "reform." They are now the party of orchestrated lying. That transformation is indelible, and will have large and permanent consequences. So, too, will the exposure of the radical moral bankruptcy of organized feminism. It now seems that it may be poor Al Gore who will pay the price for Clinton's deceit. But the price will be paid.

A final thought. Before laying all the blame for this presidential equivalent of the O.J. Simpson trial on the jury, Republicans ought to devote a moment's reflection to the Marcia Clarks on their own side. One important reason that Clinton got away with false statements to a federal grand jury was that the American public has succumbed to scandal fatigue. Too many accusations were thrown too recklessly at this administration: wild charges about murders in Arkansas or in the White House, cocaine-snorting in Little Rock hotel rooms, drug-smuggling via Mena airport. After all that, proof positive that the President has perjured himself seems positively anticlimactic. It could fairly be said that the snuffing-out of the Lewinsky scandal was Vince Foster's last service to his President.

DAVID FRUM, *the author of* Dead Right, *is working on a history of the 1970's, to be published by Basic Books.*

David Gelernter

THE '98 elections suggest that it has dawned on most Americans that we are in bad moral trouble, but we do not know what to do about it. We are so far from shore, it is more frightening to make for home than to go on drifting farther and farther out. We are torn and can't decide. Most Americans (my guess is) wanted to condemn the President but couldn't; they lacked the words. Condemning him would have contravened principles urged on the nation relentlessly for a generation by schools and colleges, TV shows and movies, clergymen, politicians, editorial writers, rock stars, celebrity newscasters. Republicans could have done something useful but did not; their problem is not zeal, it is zeal-lessness. In approaching a difficult animal you must either be charming or, if your mission is unwelcome, sufficiently clear and commanding to carry conviction. If you merely scowl and mutter, you provoke attack. Republicans have just gotten mauled.

It had seemed during the 1990's as if Americans were trying to get over a binge. From the late 1960's through the early 80's, Christian and Jewish moral principle had been temporarily suspended, like alternate-side-of-the-street parking rules. At first this was a great convenience. You could park anywhere. Unmarried sex was fine, adultery could downright *improve* a marriage, unmarried motherhood was fine, homosexuality and unrestricted abortion were two more menu choices for a generation that prided itself on fancy menus. And presumably the menu would go on expanding forever. Men were free at last to pursue the shining dream that has moved and inspired so many: to have sex with as many women as possible.

By the fall of 1998, many Americans had concluded that the Binge was a mistake, and we should not have suspended morality after all. But nobody knew how to un-suspend it. The editors of COMMENTARY ask where the public stands on moral matters. It stands in a rising tide of remorse, with cold feet, but unable to move. We no longer believe in debauchery, but we know how it works, and we know how to do it. How to operate a nation on the basis of Judeo-Christian moral principles is a technique that escapes us. We can't remember.

Enter Monica: Americans dimly recalled that adultery was wrong, but couldn't remember why. Must be something to do with "hurting people." But the President's wife had forgiven him. Shouldn't that end the matter? In any case, Linda Tripp the unfaithful friend was incomparably worse than Bill Clinton the unfaithful husband. Friendships are important; you can't terminate a friendship with a mere no-fault decree.

Nonetheless the public *did* believe, I think, that something was seriously out of whack in the

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President's behavior. Any man could err, but remorseless serial adultery was ugly. It no longer seemed perfectly okay (as it had during the Binge) to take up a dazed-and-dazzled young girl on any offer she could be induced to make. Everyone told lies, but to lie while backfiring bluster and indignation and self-righteousness, and then send forth your staff and even your wife to spread the good news—that was pretty low. The President was a billboard-sized message to the nation: this is you. This is what you have become. Like it?

AMERICANS WANTED to condemn the President, but did not know how. Did not know what moral disapproval even *meant*. Haven't I been taught that it is a sin to be "judgmental"? If I dare to disapprove, won't the whole world rip into *me*? If I have ever sinned myself, doesn't that disqualify me as a judge forever? If it strikes me that the President acted boorishly, isn't that just my personal view, and haven't I been taught that all *personal views* are equally valid, and that it is a sin to *impose your personal morality* on anybody else? Jews and Christians believe that adultery is a grave sin, but doesn't it say in the Constitution that religion must be booted out of public life? If the public schools and civic arena must be purged of religion, scrubbed clean of every last trace of it, surely it must be wrong to cast a vote based on mere *religious beliefs*.

Republicans (and, for that matter, Democrats) might have sensed the public's dilemma and addressed it. Might have used the crisis to focus attention on the real questions: what *do* we think of adultery? And religion, and marriage, and sex, and family? But the most famous GOP comment on the Lewinsky affair was Orrin Hatch's. He listened to the President holding forth, and said, "What a jerk." A muttered aside; it figures. Conservatives in office lack the resolve, by and large, to stand up and speak into the microphone.

If Republicans in Congress had anything remotely approaching zeal, they would say: "Forget impeachment. Forget censure. We're calling the whole thing off, because of a national emergency." Then they would go home and each give this speech 500 times: "We don't care about this President, we care about the nation. The President has to be censured (if he's going to be) not by Congress but by you. He's got to be impeached not in the Senate but in your hearts and minds. We therefore implore you to look at this man and ask yourselves, did your father act this way? Did your grandfathers? If they did, are you glad? Do you want this for your sons? What role would you choose for your daughters—Bill Clinton's suffering, humiliated wife or one of his neat selection of sex toys? We understand that you yourself might have done just as bad as the President—but if so, that doesn't excuse you from condemning him, it only obligates you to condemn yourself, too. We understand you've been taught otherwise. Forget that, it was all a ghastly mistake."

I'm not holding my breath. But Republicans aren't dumb; they'll spiff up their campaign ads, and do much better in 2000. I'm not sure it will make very much difference.

DAVID GELERNTER, *professor of computer science at Yale, is the author, most recently, of* Machine Beauty.

James K. Glassman

THE STRENGTH shown by the Democrats in the 1998 elections was considerable, undeniable, and predictable. Republicans failed because they refused to run on a policy agenda, even though they had one at hand—cutting taxes and holding down spending, the precise agenda that helped produce the economic prosperity of the past sixteen years. So what did they stand for? By default, nothing much, besides impeachment—a point hammered home in a series of obnoxious and self-defeating commercials run during the final days of the campaign.

Why no agenda? First, an egregious strategic miscalculation by House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who lost his job as a result, and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, who should have. They apparently figured that, with peace and prosperity, incumbents would be reelected and, with history on their side (only one other President—FDR!—had led his party to gains in the House in a midterm election), Republicans would add to their majorities in Congress. It was an awful mistake.

Second, the campaign represented a failure of will. Republicans were afraid to push a serious tax cut—despite a $70-billion budget surplus—because President Clinton would accuse them (somehow) of damaging Social Security. They were afraid to stand up for spending restraint—instead, approving a massive highway bill and

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$21 billion in "emergency" outlays—because they worried that Clinton would veto their appropriations legislation and then accuse them of shutting down the government, as he did with such success three years earlier.

What was left? Lewinsky.

Impeachment proved the worst mistake of all. Americans did not want to expel their President—perjurer, fornicator, obstructionist, and felon though he may be. Why not? First, they saw (inaccurately but understandably) his presence in the White House as essential to the prosperity they were enjoying. Second, and perhaps more important, they were appalled at the way he had been treated.

Does this reaction indicate a progressive degradation of the moral fiber of Americans? I think not. Americans believe in a good, moral, ethical, religious life and try to practice it. But they place morality in the private realm, not the public. For example, a Gallup poll last year found that 52 percent of respondents believed that homosexuality "is not an acceptable alternative life-style." But 84 percent said homosexuals "should have equal rights in terms of job opportunities." Most Americans, it is clear, believe Friedrich A. Hayek's contention that, in a free, representative democracy, "we agree to tolerate much that we dislike."

What Americans will not tolerate is superaggressive prosecution of misbehavior related to conduct in the private sphere. What Bill Clinton did with Monica Lewinsky was revolting—and, certainly, by any standard, immoral—but his pursuit by Kenneth Starr frightened people. The last straw was the tape of Clinton's August deposition, in which, it is widely agreed, the President obfuscated and lied. But it was the nature of the questions, the invasion of privacy (even of such a public figure as the President), that disgusted and scared so many.

Americans draw a line, increasingly brighter, between how people behave in private and what the government should do about it. Yes (I know, I know), the Clinton scandal is not about sex; it is about lying. *De jure*, of course. But, *de facto*, not at all. It is truly about sex, and, when it comes to sex, Americans fear the knock on the door, as they should.

SO WHERE does this leave conservatism? The movement's foundation has long been a triad: a strong defense, free-market economics, and the enforcement of a moral or social code through government action. Defense was stripped of its urgency when the cold war ended, and a similar process is unfolding with social issues. The most politically fruitful of the social issues—welfare abuse and crime—have diminished in urgency since the late 1980's and have been largely usurped by Democrats anyway. Now, the "character" issue has also been neutered. In that sense, the rejection of impeachment in the November 3 elections is as important as the collapse of the Berlin Wall. What is left of the social leg of the triad has little kick: moral education (for national Republicans, a difficult matter since the Constitution leaves it to the states) and abortion (the most private of public issues).

Still, both parties have a stake in elevating the religious Right—Republicans to flatter, Democrats to frighten. In fact, that faction performed miserably in the election, failing to reelect Governor David Beasley in South Carolina and Senator Lauch Faircloth in North Carolina.

Some intellectuals have been trying to reinvigorate conservatism with what William Kristol and David Brooks call an "appeal to American greatness." What does this phrase mean? At first, it seemed to be a virile anti-China spirit, but, as the Lewinsky scandal broke in January, the appeal shifted toward impeachment as a moral issue, much as William J. Bennett has portrayed it. But as a crusade for greatness, impeachment was bound to fail. The President's behavior embarrasses us all, even those who rail against it.

Conservatives are left, then, with free-market economics. Under that rubric, I would place school vouchers, privatized Social Security, and deregulation, as well as free trade, tax cuts, and restraint in government spending. That is more than enough work for the next century or so, especially when placed in the broader context of liberty.

Herbert Croly, founder of the *New Republic*, argued that it was not enough to allow America's future to emerge "merely by virtue of maintaining intact a set of political institutions and by vigorous individual pursuit of private ends." This formulation that Croly rejected is a pretty good expression of where conservatives should aim: toward building strong, limited, honest institutions (of the sort that Clinton betrayed) that allow private individuals—alone, in businesses, in free associations, in religious groups, in families—to pursue happiness: that is, in the framers' meaning, the good, the moral.

In such a framework, conservatism will probably do its best work *outside* government, influ-

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encing the culture. Considering the quality of thought and action in Washington these days, I do not think outside is such a terrible place to be.

JAMES K. GLASSMAN, *is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a columnist for the* Washington Post.

Jeane J. Kirkpatrick

TO THE surprise of many, the political temper of the American electorate, reflected in the November elections, was little different from the political temper two years earlier when a plurality of voters gave another four years in the White House to Bill Clinton and control of both Houses of the Congress to the Republicans. The 1998 elections, in other words, essentially maintained the status quo, with a very slight tilt toward Democrats in the House—and that was more for local and idiosyncratic reasons than because of new national trends.

The widespread but mistaken impression that Democrats scored a major victory over Republicans in November was a result of the Republicans' expectations of a sweeping victory, expectations trumpeted on the networks for weeks in advance of the elections. Assuredly, Democrats did score a sweeping victory in this "expectations" contest, as they did in post-election media coverage. This focused heavily on the few Democratic wins, embellished by speculation concerning the resignation of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, then by the resignation itself, which was in turn explained as a consequence of his "responsibility" for the "Republican defeat." The subsequent leadership contest further enhanced impressions of Republican disarray.

In fact, however, Gingrich deserves credit for having masterminded three consecutive Republican majorities in the House, and the impression that Republicans suffered major electoral losses is spurious. No less misguided, in my judgment, is the suggestion that the elections were a personal triumph for Clinton over Gingrich, Kenneth Starr, and the Republicans.

In particular, the elections told us next to nothing about the public's view of the President's future. This is partly because he was not himself a candidate, partly because many Democratic candidates sought to distance themselves from him, and especially because the separation of congressional from presidential elections in "off" years insulates a President from the swings of opinion characteristic of British and other parliamentary systems.

ALTHOUGH SOME Democrats and some media pundits cited the election results to bolster the view that the people had "exonerated" the President for his misdeeds, that is absurd. The President was no more a candidate for exoneration in these elections than he was a candidate for office. While repeated polls over the last year have found that a majority of Americans do not see the President's sexual misconduct as disqualifying him for the presidency, no one *defends* his conduct—not his fellow Democrats, not James Carville, not even the President himself. Instead, they, too, deplore his womanizing—on government time, in the Oval Office, with a White House intern—his lies under oath to a grand jury, and his efforts to suborn potential witnesses.

As for Republican leaders, many of them seem to have made the opposite error, expecting a more powerful and more negative reaction to the evidence of Bill Clinton's misconduct. What they failed to notice was that the same polls reporting widespread disapproval of the President's conduct revealed that a majority of Americans also opposed impeaching and convicting him, and that a discouraging number of our fellow citizens *approve* of his conduct of public affairs. Indeed, the Clinton-Lewinsky affair and the many surrounding issues have made it clearer than ever that a large number of Americans are willing to tolerate objectionable "private" behavior in public officials and to judge "public" figures exclusively by their conduct of "public" affairs.

This is not to be lightly dismissed. I myself would have preferred that Starr not pursue the line of investigation he did, into the areas he did. Usually it has been liberals who stretch the limits of state power in pursuit of some avowedly worthy objective, and usually it has been conservatives who have sought to constrain government's powers in pursuit of a putative public good.

Of course, there is real public good involved in the Clinton-Lewinsky matter: telling the truth to a grand jury is a real public good, on which depends an even greater good—the rule of law. Still, the case for impeachment would have been more persuasive to more Americans if it concerned violations of the electoral process and/or the national interest—as seemed to be present in John

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Huang's money-raising activities on behalf of the Democratic National Committee, or the Riadys' extravagant "retainer" to Webster Hubbell, or links between campaign fund-raising and the transfer of missile technology to China, or the President's violations of his proper constitutional role in implementing treaties (Kyoto, chemical weapons) that have not been ratified.

I understand that it is necessary to build a case on the evidence one has. Nonetheless, I worry, along with other Americans, about overstepping the appropriate limits of government power, as well as the appropriate boundaries between state and society. Surely, I myself felt on reading of the proposal to "wire" Monica Lewinsky, even Presidents have rights; surely, this goes too far.

OF POLITICS after the cold war, the late François Furet wrote,

> the Right and the Left still remain, but they are stripped of their reference points, almost of their substance. The Left no longer knows what socialism is; the Right, deprived of its best argument (namely, anti-Communism), is also searching for something to distinguish it.

Now a new socialism has found its voice in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, where governments are attempting (professedly) to achieve the benefits of Right and Left through a "third way." The American Right, however, never defined itself principally in terms of "anti-Communism" (though it was profoundly anti-Communist). Instead, it has always defined itself in terms of a dynamic individualism, and the freedom necessary to develop and preserve it. Only this approach can give us democracy, the rule of law, peace, and economic growth with rising standards of living.

I believe Republicans did not do better in the elections because they did not develop broadly conservative issues, did not articulate them clearly, and did not translate into legislation the mandate given them in 1994 and again in 1996: lower taxes, smaller government, a less intrusive bureaucracy, school choice, and greater respect for individual freedom.

JEANE J. KIRKPATRICK, *who served as United States Ambassador to the United Nations from 1981 to 1985, is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.*

William Kristol

IS AMERICAN conservatism in danger of being taken over by an excess of neo-Puritan zeal?

Even a moralistic scold like me would have qualms about a resurgence of real, honest-to-goodness Puritanism. But neo-Puritan zeal strikes me as about right. Unlike its older cousin, after all, neo-Puritanism would be respectful of the principles of liberal constitutionalism. It would acknowledge the limits on soulcraft in a liberal democracy. But it would ask that liberal democrats, in turn, acknowledge that the health of liberal democracy depends on a sort of neo-Puritanism among most of its citizens. Otherwise we degenerate—we "progress"—toward Clintonism.

What is Clintonism? One could plausibly claim that it is merely self-satisfied nonjudgmentalism, a soft relativism, even an easygoing nihilism. But that would not be quite right. For Clintonism is in fact consistent with a fair amount of judgmentalism. Clintonian liberalism is perfectly willing to condemn smoking, and "homophobia"; it is also willing to be reasonably tough, tougher than liberals were a few years ago, on criminal behavior and welfare dependency. It turns out, then, that Clintonism is not simply nonjudgmental. Rather, Clintonism specifically exempts one sphere of life from all moral judgments: sex.

As Harvey Mansfield has argued in the *Weekly Standard*, when the American people gave Clinton a pass in November, "what they consented to was the doctrine of consenting adults in sex." Not a doctrine of consenting adults in general; the Clintonian embrace of the nanny state checks broader libertarian impulses. But sex is, as we say these days, privileged. Sex, and sex alone, must be free of constraint, and of judgment.

Consider the core defense of Clinton's behavior: it is only "lying about sex." Clinton's apologists occasionally sound as if they are saying that lying about sex is one of several permissible forms of lying, all of which presumably fail to reach the level of an impeachable offense. But when you listen to the arguments closely, it turns out that "lying about sex" is not just one permissible form of lying; it is *the* permissible form of lying. Just as the right to abortion is the one right that can never be abridged; just as homosexuality is the one practice that can never be criticized; so consensual sexual behavior is the

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one realm of human activity about which any sort of public moral judgment is illegitimate.

This is why, incidentally, it makes sense for Clintonian liberalism to be so concerned, at least in theory, about sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is an ugly and inevitable consequence of sexual liberation; therefore, a crusade against sexual harassment is necessary to remove any taint from the cause of sexual liberation, and to clear the field, as it were, for any and all consenting sexual activity.

More than a generation ago, the courts invented a right to privacy. This right included or implied a right to sexual freedom—first to contraception, then to abortion, now to homosexual behavior. But it has become clear that the right to privacy is not a general right of which the right to sexual freedom is a particular example. For the constitutional right to privacy exists in no other sphere than sex. The privacy right is simply a right to sexual freedom, or to sexual liberation.

What the Clinton experience shows is that the embrace of this right to sexual liberation has profound consequences. In principle, of course, one could be a libertarian about sex and strict about perjury, even if that perjury is about sex. But in practice, the commitment to sexual liberation has trumped any concern about lying or obstructing justice among Clinton's sophisticated defenders. And the combination of a right to privacy with a culture of sexual liberation has befuddled the American people: a healthy sense that we should not pry has been corrupted into a belief that we cannot judge.

THE ISSUE American conservatism has to face, then, is the question of morality and public life, which in large part means morality and sexual liberation. Bill Clinton will likely win the argument about removal from office. But it is conservatives' task to ensure that Bill Clinton does not win the argument about morality and public life. Even if Clinton slips the noose, this cannot be allowed to be taken as the final resolution by the political community of the underlying issues raised by the Clinton affair.

As Mansfield observed, when Republicans failed to make an issue of Clinton's behavior throughout 1998, they

> gave him a pass. Morality always has to make an issue of itself. Morality is about praise and blame, and it cannot afford to fall silent because silence is abdication, and abdication is consent. The Republicans kept waiting for the morality of ordinary Americans to appear, and to give the presumptuous cad Clinton a mighty swipe. But they feared appealing to morality. Having taken the easy way out themselves, they should not be surprised that the American people did the same.

Today more than ever, many Republicans want to give Clinton a pass. They want to "put it all behind us." The last thing the Republican establishment wants to do is to have to discuss morality, to have to appeal to morality, to have to explain why morality matters and what morality requires. In our age, oddly enough, appealing to morality is a fearful thing. But in politics the first of the virtues is courage.

WILLIAM KRISTOL *is the editor and publisher of the* Weekly Standard.

Forrest McDonald

IT IS a gross error to regard the November 3 elections as having been a referendum on whether Clinton should be impeached. The minor gains made by the Democrats were due to two principal factors: (1) conservative voters were disgusted with the inactivity of congressional Republicans, and especially with the Republican sell-out on the budget, and those voters stayed away from the polls in droves; and (2) the Democrats were ruthless and skillful in mobilizing selected voting blocs, area by area.

But other factors must also be remembered. Only 36 percent of the electorate voted, indicating that the voters are bored not just by the Clinton saga but by politics in general. Furthermore, this election, unlike the one in 1994—which was most exceptional—was not a national contest but a multitude of local elections turning on a multitude of issues and personalities. In Alabama, for instance, Republican Governor Fob James lost because one group of supporters, young voters, was seduced by his opponent's promise of a lottery for college scholarships—something for nothing. But in the congressional elections, all incumbents, being mostly Republicans, were reelected.

Still—to turn to the editors' second question—there can hardly be room to doubt that the

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nation has undergone a grave decline in its moral standards. Relativism and permissiveness have won; "sensitivity" toward the behavior of others, no matter how despicable, has won; the notion that self-esteem is more important than achievement has won.

Many reasons for the decline can be adduced, not least among them being the intrusiveness into our lives of the corruption that pervades Washington. Earlier, the Grant and Harding administrations were corrupt, but the scandals had virtually no impact upon society; the federal government had nothing to do, for example, with the way parents raised their children. Now, by contrast, the government pokes its nose into everything, including standards of morality. To cite but one kind of instance, the Catholic church's charities and the Salvation Army, which have been traditional carriers of religion and morality as well as of succor, now refrain from espousing religion and morality, lest they lose their government funding.

It is federal money that corrupts: take their money and they own you. Most people probably know this but are willing to take the money anyway. I once heard Frank Sinatra say on a talk show that it was easy enough to get along with the Mafia. "Just don't ever let them do you a favor." The same advice applies to the federal government.

Nevertheless, despite the general moral decline, I would insist that there is no widespread neo-Puritan impulse among conservatives. It is leftists, not conservatives, who are Puritans, who want to make people over in accordance with their views—in myriad ways, ranging from stamping out smoking to imposing correct thought; and that has been true since Rousseau. They constitute the most serious threat to our cherished freedoms.

Conservatives, by contrast, believe that every individual is responsible for the consequences of his conduct, and therefore they believe in a maximum of individual freedom. No conservative I know, for example, wants to outlaw any forms of sexual behavior, except to protect children; but every conservative I know recognizes that the consequences of various kinds of sexual behavior can be costly indeed, as witness the widespread incidence of sexually-transmitted diseases, illegitimacy, and broken homes.

AS FOR the broader issue of the current state of conservatism in America, I have mixed feelings that have nothing to do with such minor blips on the horizon as congressional elections. On the one hand, I believe that the vast majority of mainstream Americans of whatever racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds share a hard core of conservative values in the sense in which Edmund Burke or Russell Kirk would define these terms. On the other hand, I am deeply concerned about the large and growing number of unassimilated and perhaps unassimilable young people in our midst. I am afraid that our nongovernmental institutions may not be up to the task of overcoming that problem. If government takes it on, under the direction of either liberals or conservatives, heaven help us.

FORREST MCDONALD *is professor of history at the University of Alabama and the author of* The American Presidency: An Intellectual History, *among other books.*

Walter A. McDougall

SINGING OF "old lady judges" who watch "people in pairs" and push "fake morals," Bob Dylan, in 1965, judged obscenity a non-issue ("who really cares?") and summarily declared: "Propaganda, all is phony." Thus did baby boomers in general nurse their outrage upon learning (or being instructed) that the trinity of our American civic religion—Superman's "truth, justice, and the American way"—was a fraud. Professing to be disillusioned by the discovery that, in matters of race, religion, sex, drugs, alcohol, business, and foreign relations, the real American way amounted to cant, they proclaimed themselves "Supermen" in the Nietzschean sense and decreed a transvaluation of values.

From the 1960's on, what used to be regarded as vices were hailed as positive goods, and what used to be thought of as healthy—patriotism, marriage, work, self-reliance, and discipline—were Bastilles to be stormed and dismantled. According to the ethic of "do your own thing," "don't be judgmental," "get off my case," "don't lay a guilt trip on me," "self-actualize," and "I'm OK, you're OK," the only sin baby boomers came to recognize was hypocrisy itself. That is why Gary Hart (nailed as a hypocrite) went down in flames but Bill Clinton lives on (since he 'fessed up, albeit belatedly). That is why apostate

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religious leaders are applauded for expressing their "honest" doubts, while orthodox clergy are said to sow hatred. And that is why militant gays have taken to "outing" their closeted comrades.

The predicable result of this antinomian crusade has been a collapse of public morale. For any nation one-fourth of whose next generation is aborted and another third is born out of wedlock, two out of five of whose marriages fail, and two out of three of whose voters shun the polls is profoundly demoralized. Our political lassitude is only a symptom of this, and of how few Americans believe that their politicians are either able or willing to address the problems besetting us. Were the 1998 election returns the sign of a liberal resurgence, a backlash against the Republican Right, a vote of confidence in Clinton? They were none of the above, as demonstrated by the low turnout, the survival of the Republican majority, and exit polls indicating that two-thirds of voters had no interest in rendering a verdict on Clinton. I cannot speak for ethnic minorities, but white baby boomers by and large want neither to celebrate this President nor to impeach him—for whatever they do to him, they do to themselves.

In the middle run, the returns of 1998 could not have been much *better* for Republicans. The "six-year" yardstick should not be applied because the landslide of 1994 skewed the political cycle, while continued peace and prosperity (and the people's unspoken worry about their fragility) indicated a status-quo outcome. To use a Wall Street analogy, the Republican bull market suffered a mild correction on a low volume of trading. If anything, the loss of a few seats—and of the "hypocritical" Newt Gingrich, anathematized by the media for having chased from office former Speaker Jim Wright—can only energize the Republican party to rally and focus and run scared again. The alternative result—a larger Republican majority virtually obliged to impeach—would have turned all Democrats not named Bill Clinton into persecuted underdogs during the run-up to November 2000.

In the long term, however, the state of the union is perilous. For if Clinton completes two full terms despite abuses of power whose scale and motives, in my opinion, dwarf those of Richard Nixon, then the baby boom's transvaluation of values will have received the masses' stamp of approval, and the "everyone-does-it" defense, combined with O.J. Simpson's "they're-just-out-to-get-me" defense, will reify the boomers' initial indictment: that, in effect, "the American way" has nothing to do with truth and justice. That is why the Republicans had to vote to impeach, in spite of the political price they might pay, because the soul of the Democratic party as well as their own is at stake.

"CYNICISM," WROTE the Cambridge historian F. M. Cornford, "is the besetting and venial fault of declining youth, and disillusionment its last illusion." It is high time we fifty-somethings quit waving the bloody shirts of civil rights and the Vietnam war and admit that our own war on hypocrisy was itself hypocritical, that our precious disillusionment was a pose, and that today the danger from "neo-Puritan zeal" is more pronounced on the politically-correct Left than on the religious Right.

Writing about the "habits of restraint" that checked the "imagination of the Americans, even in its greatest flights," Tocqueville observed, hopefully:

> Hitherto no one in the United States has dared to advance the maxim that everything is permissible for the interests of society, an impious adage which seems to have been invented in an age of freedom to shelter all future tyrants. Thus, while the law permits the Americans to do what they please, religion prevents them from conceiving, and forbids them to commit, what is rash and unjust.

Today it is conservatives who hold that private restraint must somehow be restored if American liberty is to survive. It is the transvalued Left, intolerant (as it says) of naught but intolerance, that lusts after power to control the behavior and even the thoughts of citizens. No slogan more potentially totalitarian has ever dogged a democracy than "the personal is political."

Life, holds the Canadian novelist Robertson Davies, is a journey "from confident inexperience through the bitterness of experience toward the rueful wisdom of self-knowledge." Now that the baby boomers are aging, will they usher in a politics of rueful self-knowledge? Or will they engage in the same sort of generational cover-up they once attributed to their parents and have used to justify all manner of mischief? If the latter, then the older generation will again have failed to play its proper role as mentor and model, our youth will despise or ignore what passes for politics, and our imperial presidency will shift from its present canter to a gallop.

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Or, as a much-wizened Bob Dylan warned in 1998, "It's not dark yet, but it's getting there."

WALTER A. MCDOUGALL *is professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania and the editor of* Orbis, *the Foreign Policy Research Institute's journal of world affairs.*

Richard John Neuhaus

WHO WOULD have thought it? After the Reagan "revolution" and the congressional triumph of 1994, the GOP leadership, so to speak, seems to be following the *New York Times* definition of the political mainstream. Conservative "moderates" bask in the warm approval of the paper's editors, who are filled with good ideas for the future of conservatism.

But for those who are somewhat removed from the political battles, the Republicans offer a bemusing spectacle. With Bob Dole in 1996 and again in the elections of 1998, hubris counseled that the choice was so obvious, there was no need to make the case. The whine arose, "Where is the outrage?" and the American people were faulted for not recognizing the self-evident superiority of the good guys. We may be witnessing, among some Republicans, the emergence of a new "blame-America-first" crowd.

There is much portentous talk about what has gone wrong with the "American character." My hunch is that such talk is, for the most part, self-serving blather. From Crèvecoeur and Tocqueville up to the present moment, the American character is marked much more by continuity than by discontinuity. So why, faced with the Clinton squalor, did the people not want to throw the rascal out—or, more precisely, put the other rascals in? Because, being sensible, they are half-attentive to politics; because they are repulsed by what was successfully depicted as a partisan exploitation of the scatological; because they have learned in church that you should judge not lest you be judged, and have confused that with being "nonjudgmental"; because otherwise things seemed to be going well; and because the little-boy President acted so very contrite, and many think him a likable rogue, although they certainly do not want their children to be like him. Anyway, the connection between despising Clinton and electing Republicans to Congress is still another thing that is not self-evident.

I am a little surprised by the utter shamelessness of the Democrats and their media allies in asserting that the President is above the law. But of course, they say, these are very little laws, and the whole thing is, after all, about sex. We all know that "everybody" does it. Would you have impeached Jefferson? And so forth. Most striking was the readiness of political feminists to stand by their man, even if it meant their movement had to commit *hara-kiri*. From barefoot in the kitchen to on your knees at the office, you've come a long way, baby. It was not for love of Clinton that feminists were prepared to make the sacrifice, however, but for fear of what his opponents might do to "reproductive rights." This demonstrates once again that abortion is the unevadable question in our political culture—although, to be sure, Clinton's opponents are mostly doing their best to evade it.

The risible canard that conservatism is oppressively Puritanical is an invention of the *Times* editors on West 43rd Street. (It is also an ignorant slander of the Puritans.) Writing in their Sunday magazine, Andrew Sullivan says *First Things* is "the spiritual nerve center of the new conservatism," and the really shocking thing about this new conservatism is that it is challenging what he calls the "post-1960's settlement" on culture and morality, with specific reference to the acceptance of the homosexual movement, of which Sullivan is a leading advocate.

That pseudo-settlement—with the license to unlimited abortion as its crucial clause—has unsettled American public life for three decades. Popular dissent from it was the necessary condition for the conservative ascendancy and the majority status of the Republican party. That some conservatives are, at this late date, prepared to sign on to the settlement reflects a boundless desire for a respectability that is in the exclusive gift of their implacable foes. They will finally be honored with the title of "moderate," even if it appears in their political obituary.

WHAT IS needed for the future is persuasive argument for the causes that have or can gain the support of a politically effective majority of the electorate. This is sometimes known as leadership. Looking to 2000, Steve Forbes has shown that he is ready and able to make such arguments. I think George W. Bush holds great promise, if he does not try to evade the abovementioned unevadable. And there may be others. In both tone and substance, these causes can and

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should be presented in terms of principle, fairness, and human caring.

A partial list of such causes includes: parental choice in education; dramatic tax reduction for working families and owners of small businesses, joined to a frontal challenge to the IRS; an effective check on the judicial usurpation of politics; more ambitious moves to replace statist welfarism with voluntarism, including faith-based agencies; putting health-care money into the hands of consumers; prudent measures to protect the nation against missile attack and terrorism.

But there will be no "morning in America" without addressing the question of who belongs to the community for which we accept common responsibility, which is what the abortion dispute is about. Among pro-life leaders there is unanimous agreement on the goal: every unborn child protected in law and welcomed in life. There is almost unanimous agreement that the goal will never be achieved fully, but we must work toward it step by step. For 30 years I have studied the survey research, and the fact is that 75 percent of the American people say that abortion should not be permitted for the reasons that 95 percent of abortions are obtained.

That so few leaders are ready or able to give politically effective expression to such overwhelming sentiment is a continuing astonishment. That so many conservatives are intimidated by the claim that it is "extremist" to challenge the moral and legal right to kill unborn children at any time for any reason gives continuing and mostly undeserved credibility to the charge that conservatism is the party not only of the stupid but of the craven.

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS *is president of the Institute on Religion and Public Life and editor-in-chief of* First Things.

Michael Novak

IN THE November elections, Republicans actually garnered more votes and more seats than Democrats. But in opposing impeachment and giving high marks to Bill Clinton as President (although not as a man of character), the electorate showed itself to be far out of tune with the large majority of the House that in early October had asked the Judiciary Committee to open an impeachment inquiry. Whether popular or not, however, this issue is important to the well-being of the whole people. It is especially important for minorities, since yielding to majority feelings outside the law is always a dire threat.

What, then, is at stake? The President of the United States takes a solemn oath, before the entire nation and before an Undeceivable Judge, that he will "faithfully execute the laws of the United States." These laws classify perjury as a felony. Because of false testimony concerning an adulterous entanglement, for instance, Henry Cisneros was obliged to quit as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development in President Clinton's cabinet and to stand trial.

Beyond his own multiple perjuries, one of the worst offenses of President Clinton, to my mind, lay in abetting a twenty-three-year-old woman in the act of perjuring *herself* regarding their relationship. Further, in a deposition before a federal judge, the President brazenly vouched for the "veracity" of her false testimony. (His personal lawyer has formally apologized to the judge for unwittingly being conscripted into that lie.) To treat a young lover in this way—to make her liable to criminal penalties for perjury in a federal court—is caddish and dishonorable behavior. In a President, the act is also a high crime and misdemeanor, both in itself and in its consequences for due process of law throughout the nation. If perjury is disqualifying for a cabinet officer, is it not more so for the head of the cabinet?

A man of honor would have resigned his office in January 1998, to spare the nation the need to dig out the whole squalid truth. Instead, admitting nothing, lying with bold and reckless disregard, the President forced the nation to uncover inch by inch the acts by which he had behaved like a teenage adulterer, committed perjury many times, and implicated his closest associates and his entire administration in a cover-up. At last found out, he then dared the nation to impeach him. In addition, he unleashed an "attack machine" of such unprecedented ferocity in its ability to destroy the reputation of individual citizens that he gave new meaning to the word "bully" in "bully pulpit."

If Clinton were a Republican, he would have been impeached enthusiastically. As it is, I will never again find it possible to take seriously professions of respect for the rule of law on the part of Clinton Democrats—as represented, for example, on the House Judiciary Committee. I also believe that the extent to which the Clinton Left

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has become the party of hate, vituperation, and race-baiting will not long go unnoticed by the American electorate. The names of James Carville, Barney Frank, and Maxine Waters will one day live in infamy; the de-moralizing leader of the lot is the President they have served.

AS FOR the moral state of the American people in general, we know from polls that Americans overwhelmingly disapprove of the President's behavior. But one great and disturbing difference shows up between whites and blacks, the latter of whom seem to exhibit much moral empathy for Clinton. Moreover, conversations in many parts of the nation have persuaded me that more white Americans than I would have thought have also adopted a permissive sexual ethic. Such persons defend Clinton with, "It's his private life." When I ask them, "Did you say the same thing in the case of Anita Hill's charges against Clarence Thomas, or in the cases of Senators Tower and Packwood?," they are invariably silent. Building up a strong moral ethos in a nation is the work of generations. Moral tides, when they go out, ebb swiftly.

My sense is that the public is moving like a river formed by two currents that, even as they flow forward, increasingly repel each other toward opposite banks. Those who think that freedom means doing whatever one wants cannot tolerate those who think that freedom means doing what one ought, bound by laws of nature and nature's God. The latter can tolerate but cannot follow the former's lead, and will not say there are no standards.

Does the latter position amount to "neo-Puritanism," the Left's new demon? The hysteria on this subject may be due to something as simple as bad faith. Not content with the virtually universal tolerance that characterizes present-day America, the Left now insists on forcing everyone to vocalize moral approval for its own bizarre agenda. To see today's collectivizing, intolerant, and self-indulgent Left at work, one need only visit a university campus. Where there is no ideal of truth, there is only conformity. To such a Left, "Confirm thy soul in self-control" may sound like neo-Puritanism. But it was once the essence of the liberal idea.

As for conservatives, the cause of self-government—both in private life and in public life—is still a Rock of Gibraltar. I hesitate to speak of "conservatives," because those who belong to the party of liberty—cultural, political, and economic—have hold of a dynamic principle, the raw energy that drives forward history itself, and are enjoined to prepare for the future as well as to cherish the past. In addition, all the survey data I have seen suggest that, in sexual love, those of religious and "conservative" views actually have more fun than others; for them, at least, sexual acts are fraught with meaning.

Once we have taken on board the sad experiences of the 20th century, two great questions remain: What does self-government mean in public life? What does it mean in private life? Surely, these two questions are politically related. The nation's founders thought so.

MICHAEL NOVAK *is the George Frederick Jewett Scholar in Religion and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute. His many books include* The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism *and* Choosing Presidents.

Norman Podhoretz

ASSUMING THAT the last election was in fact a referendum on Clinton, I am strongly tempted to describe it as the latest indication that we are now living in a culture in which anyone can get away with anything. Having discovered, in our criminal-justice system, that an O.J. Simpson can get away with murder, we now see in the political realm that a Bill Clinton can, without being punished by the electorate, commit perjury and violate the laws against sexual harassment that he himself has supported. And correlatively, in case we were so obtuse as not to notice it before, we have learned from the way Monica Lewinsky has been treated that a young woman no longer need fear being condemned for committing sexual acts whose exposure would only yesterday have caused her unbearable humiliation and shame. (But this is putting it too gently: even the grand jury before which she recanted the lies she had earlier told in a deposition about her relations with the President went out of its way to express sympathy for her and wish her well.)

Yet no sooner do I see myself giving vent to such judgments than a thousand qualifications rise up before my eyes and I begin drawing away from a summary so unmodulated and so lacking in nuance. Obviously, plenty of people do not get away with murder. And since about 115 poor

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saps are currently sitting in prison for doing exactly what Bill Clinton did in testifying before a federal jury, while countless other men who had uncoerced sex with subordinates in the workplace have been summarily fired, it is equally obvious that not everyone gets away with lying under oath or violating the laws against sexual harassment. Finally, from what I hear, the word "slut" is still being freely hurled at girls like Monica Lewinsky by both sexes even in the most "sophisticated" high schools of the land.

I might also add that in some sense neither O.J. Simpson nor Bill Clinton nor Monica Lewinsky has gone scot-free. Moving down the ladder of criminal and/or moral seriousness, Simpson has been punished through a civil suit and turned into a pariah. Clinton has been put through a legal and financial wringer, and, whether or not he finishes out his term in office, he has already besmirched the "legacy" and the historical record about which he is evidently so concerned and has simultaneously undermined his own presidential powers. And, at the lowest rung, Monica Lewinsky too has paid a price in notoriety for which she will not easily be compensated, especially as the deal she reportedly made for her inevitable tell-all book turned out to be far less lucrative than she had hoped.

SO WHERE does this leave us? Well, at the very least, there remains not a shadow of a doubt that standards so recently prevalent in the three areas I have singled out—the criminal-justice system, the political world, and the sexual arena—have drastically declined. Of course, many Americans out there consider such changes a sign of great progress: more maturity, more tolerance, less repression, more freedom, etc., etc. But there are also many who regard these same changes as confirmation that Daniel Patrick Moynihan was even more on target than they may originally have thought when he spoke of "defining deviancy down." The great social question is how to determine the balance of power between these two opposing groups, whom I like to call the liberationists and the traditionalists.

Some of my closest friends in the same traditionalist camp of which I am a member believe that the last election definitely confirmed what the polls had already led them despairingly to suspect: that the liberationists have won, and that the various cultural viruses let loose in the 60's have by now infected the American people as a whole. I resist this conclusion. My own view is that the two armies waging the "culture war" not only have been fighting each other but have also been engaged in a kind of tacit negotiation through which accommodations are being reached.

To illustrate, let me restrict myself to the political realm and perform a "thought experiment" by eliminating from consideration the sexual and other scandals in which the Clinton administration has been embroiled, and let me focus instead entirely on what he has done to the Democratic party. The result of this experiment is to make it clear that (admittedly after a shaky two-year start) Clinton has accomplished what some of us spent so many years clamoring for: he has de-McGovernized the Democrats and pushed them toward the Center. (I should stress that I am talking only about domestic affairs: in foreign policy, McGovernite language may have been purged from the speeches of the President and his people, but the McGovernite *dybbuk* remains to be exorcised from the actions they have taken or have been reflexively inhibited from taking.)

I would even go so far as to claim that this move to the Center is one of the main reasons the Democrats did better in the last election, and the Republicans less well, than everyone had anticipated. Yes, the state of the economy was a major factor. Yet even there, it is worth noting that Clinton shed the anti-business bias that was a principal element of McGovernism by keeping Alan Greenspan on as chairman of the Federal Reserve and appointing Robert Rubin as Secretary of the Treasury. Think also of the new harder line taken by Clinton and other Democrats on issues like welfare and crime, and the rhetorical bows they all feel forced to make in the direction of "family values" and religion. Of course Clinton himself is being hypocritical when he does this, but hypocrisy is still the tribute vice pays to virtue, and therefore is a form of affirming the validity of virtue even while failing to practice it.

In this connection, I want to stress that though there certainly are a number of conservatives who might be characterized as driven by "a neo-Puritan zeal," it is simply absurd to suggest that this condition has extended to conservatism in general or to conservative intellectuals in particular (never mind the Republican party!). Many of us, to begin with, oppose the laws against sexual harassment and deplore the fact that some conservatives, in their eagerness to unseat Clinton, have stepped in to defend those laws just when

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their liberal and feminist progenitors—in *their* eagerness to defend Clinton—have brazenly been pretending that this was not what they meant at all.

Many of us conservatives have also lived through enough to understand the moral complexities of the sexual life, thank you. But we also understand that no society—not even this one—is made up of isolated individuals. From which it follows that there is no such thing as a purely private act where sex is concerned; spouses, children, and the society at large are inevitably unwitting partners and potential victims, or, in the best of circumstances, beneficiaries. We are therefore still struggling with the problem of how to reconcile the newly expanded zone of toleration in which all Americans—the vast majority of conservatives willy-nilly included—now live with our repudiation of moral relativism and our conviction that one need not be either a theologian or a rocket scientist to tell the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. As part of this ongoing struggle, we are still trying to figure out how best to discharge our citizenly duty to encourage what is right and good and to discourage what is wrong and evil.

I THINK Clinton deserves to be removed from office, but it now seems highly unlikely that he will be, and this failure is bound to exact moral and political costs of indeterminate size. But so far as I am concerned, there are silver linings in this dark cloud. One is that the wretched law which established the Office of Independent Counsel—a law Clinton himself prevented from expiring when he had a chance to do so—may at long last be abrogated now that the Democrats have discovered (I daresay to their self-righteous astonishment) that it can be used against them as well as against Republicans. With it into the trash heap of American history will go, if we are lucky, the banana-republic habit we have developed of conducting political battles through investigations instead of through arguments, and through criminalizing opponents instead of working to beat them at the polls.

On the whole I would say that liberalism is not doing so well in the moral/cultural realm as many who look only at the surface have persuaded themselves, and that conservatism, for all the Republican hand-wringing and the Democratic crowing over the election, is still not doing so badly in the political realm. In any event, the accommodations to which I referred above mean that both sides win some and lose some, and that neither side is going to get everything it wants. Not, that is, unless we have another actual civil war, and—thank God—no such calamity seems to be in the offing.

NORMAN PODHORETZ, *editor-at-large of* COMMENTARY, *is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. His new book,* Ex-Friends, *will be brought out next month by the Free Press.*

James Q. Wilson

THOSE WHO distrust Bill Clinton may not like it, but the American people in 1998 voted as they usually do: when times are good, they support the incumbents, especially those of the President's party. The economy is strong—low unemployment, little inflation, and (as of late November) a still-robust stock market. Crime rates are down sharply, and people, though still concerned about crime, no longer assign overriding importance to it. The country is at peace.

In these circumstances, it would have been astonishing if the incumbents had not done well. People who thought the economy was faring poorly tended to vote Republican in 1998, just as they had in 1994. But there were far fewer such people this time around—45 percent fewer—than there were four years ago, a shift that greatly aided the Democrats. And so, for the first time in decades, the President's party gained House seats during an off-year election.

Even more impressive was the extent to which voters told interviewers that the problems of President Clinton and the looming impeachment hearings played no role in their voting decision. This has troubled many observers, and for good reason. When the Lewinsky story first surfaced, most Americans said they felt the President's sex life was a private matter unless and until it could be shown that he had committed perjury or obstructed justice; if that happened, he should be impeached. After the Starr report appeared and after the November elections, the great majority—over four out of five—thought he *had* lied under oath and most thought he had tried to obstruct justice. But now it no longer mattered. They voted for his party, they thought he was doing a good job, and they opposed impeachment.

There are four ways to think about this puzzle.

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One is to say that many voters have sold out their morality in exchange for fat wallets and low inflation: good times produce lax judgments. The second is to believe that lying about adultery is less important than lying about whatever voters may think is more important. The third is to accept that many Americans do not care very much about politics: the President is dishonest, but his actions do not affect me enough to make me think it worth the country's while to judge him. The fourth is to believe that for the voters, a kind of political statute of limitations has expired: the President is a liar, but we have spent enough time on this and should get on to more important things.

The first view is probably true of some people, though they would not phrase it as I have done. To them, Clinton's public good deeds (whatever they are) justify his private misdeeds. Some probably have convinced themselves that he has done nothing really wrong. One-third of the voters today think that the President is not only a good President but a good person. As a social scientist I recognize the human tendency to make the world seem rational by denying anything inconsistent with your prior convictions. As an ordinary person I deplore it.

The second view is a variant of the first. As David Gelernter has pointed out in the *Weekly Standard*, many no longer take adultery very seriously. Perhaps the President made a mistake with Monica Lewinsky, but that kind of mistake ought not to count for very much. Lying about it is expected—we all do it—and lying about it under oath is not as bad as lying about the burglary of the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate. What this view ignores is that there are people in prison today for having committed perjury about seemingly small matters. Persons holding this view, therefore, have used their indifference toward adultery to grant to a celebrity a license that is denied to ordinary people.

I do not know how many people hold the third view—that government may be important in some ways, but it is not important to them personally. The numbers cannot be trivial, to judge from the high proportion of citizens who rarely vote. We may worry that this "apathy" is unhealthy, but we must admit that the opposite case—one in which everybody thinks politics is very important—is also unhealthy. Surely we do not want to be faced with a choice between the political equivalents of teenagers in a shopping mall and angry activists at a protest meeting.

The fourth view—the President is a jerk, but we have spent enough time on this and the government ought to get on with more important things—is, I suspect, the most telling one. Reinforcing it all along has been the absence of compelling, visible confirmation of the extent of the President's perjury and the degree to which he obstructed justice. When Richard Nixon was accused of covering up his aides' role in the Watergate break-in, public opinion did not turn against him until incontrovertible evidence—the testimony of John Dean and the release of the White House tapes—made the President's involvement in obstructing justice entirely clear. Little evidence of this kind has been presented against Clinton.

The Starr report alleges—plausibly, in my opinion—that Clinton did attempt to obstruct justice, but to accept that finding one must first study the report carefully or listen closely to Starr's congressional testimony. I have read the report and listened to Starr's testimony and I think he is reasonable, and so I believe Clinton has acted wrongly. But not many Americans have done this, and the press, aided by Clinton's staff, went to great lengths to make Starr seem like an obsessive, out-of-control Puritan with a deep grudge. In the face of this, and without an authoritative witness to testify in widely televised hearings, Clinton's survival seemed assured.

The problem with the fourth view is that it treats the President as legally more worthy of deference than is the ordinary citizen. Whether it is about sex or anything else, ordinary people are often punished for perjury, even in civil cases. Many of them are now behind bars, sent there by judges who do not, by and large, read opinion polls about the accused. The President can only be punished by Congress, and Congress is manifestly driven by opinion polls.

People now in prison for perjury may wonder why they have been treated so harshly when a man often described as the chief law-enforcement officer of the country is treated so generously. Would another law-enforcement officer—a sheriff or a police chief—be treated so well? Was Richard Nixon? I think not.

JAMES Q. WILSON, *whose books include* American Government, Political Organizations, *and* The Moral Sense, *is emeritus professor at UCLA.*

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Wye and the Road to War

Douglas J. Feith

THE CLINTON administration has made a practice of quieting crises in faraway places by striking costly deals with international malefactors, buying the unsustainable from the unreliable. The dividend from these transactions—in Iraq, North Korea, the Balkans—has not been peace, security, or disarmament but, on occasion, signing ceremonies. Thus it was again this past October, in the negotiations that President Clinton personally superintended at Maryland's Wye Plantation between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Yasir Arafat, chairman of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

The Wye talks responded to a crisis in the Oslo "process"—the diplomacy based on the 1993 peace accords signed by Arafat and Israel's then-prime minister, the late Yitzhak Rabin. The process itself was suffering the death of a thousand Palestinian violations. Wye revived it with a new agreement that has been hailed not only for breaking a stalemate but for carrying the parties toward genuine peace and brightening prospects for an end to the entire Arab-Israeli conflict.

To say the least, such hopes are unrealistic. The Wye deal imparts the appearance of vitality to Oslo as one might paint the cheeks of an expiring patient. In line with the entire series of Palestinian-Israeli agreements of which it forms a part, it is likelier to produce war than peace and likelier to endanger than to promote U.S. interests in the region—in particular, the U.S. interest in a secure Israel.

DOUGLAS J. FEITH, *an attorney in Washington, D.C., served during the Reagan administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense and as a Middle East specialist on the White House National Security Council staff.*

THE LAST such agreement between the parties was concluded in January 1997, when the recently-elected Netanyahu, intent on giving the Oslo experiment at least one more chance for success, consented to withdraw Israeli forces from the West Bank city of Hebron. He did so without first requiring the PA to cure any of its outstanding violations of promises made in earlier agreements.

The Hebron accord displeased many of Netanyahu's backers in the Likud party. In Israel's 1996 election campaign, after all, Likud had charged incumbent Prime Minister Shimon Peres with conducting a one-sided peace process in which Israel never insisted successfully, or even sincerely, that the Palestinian side fulfill its obligations. After defeating Peres, Netanyahu had made "reciprocity" his government's byword. Now his core constituency threw back at him the very criticisms he had directed against Peres.

To distinguish his government's diplomacy from that of his predecessors, Netanyahu defended the Hebron deal by stressing, first, that *henceforth* "the fulfillment of the undertakings of one side would be dependent upon fulfillment by the other side," and, second, that Israel in its sole discretion would determine the extent of any further redeployments of

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forces. This, he reassured the Knesset, was "also the way in which the United States interprets the [Hebron] agreement." In a "Note for the Record," signed by the U.S. mediator Dennis Ross, there was a list of unfulfilled Palestinian pledges (to combat terrorism, confiscate illegal firearms, limit the number of Palestinian police, prevent hostile propaganda, and amend the PLO Charter), and there was an American promise that these "commitments will be dealt with immediately"; a letter from Secretary of State Warren Christopher likewise pledged an American effort to ensure "reciprocity." Vowing that there would be no new agreements until the PA complied with the old ones, Netanyahu won approval of the Hebron accords from the Israeli parliament.

Israel withdrew from Hebron. The PA, however, did not remedy—indeed, has not yet remedied—any of the violations listed in the Note for the Record. Nor did the Clinton administration fulfill its promise to press the PA on compliance. Nor was Israel allowed to determine on its own the scope of further redeployments. To the contrary, the Clinton administration developed its own proposal, endorsed by the PA, for a withdrawal from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Then the PA and the U.S. pressured Israel over many months to accept the American proposal. Eventually, they succeeded in getting Netanyahu to do what he had vowed not to do.

On this slag heap of multilateral promise-breaking, the Wye talks convened in October.

THE ESSENCE of the Wye River Memorandum, as the agreement is called, is a pledge from Israel to withdraw from more territory. In addition to laying out the terms for that withdrawal, a section entitled "Security" obliges the Palestinian side, "in conformity with prior agreements," to take steps to combat terror, collect illegal weapons, provide Israel with a list of its policemen, amend the PLO Charter, and so forth. The Memorandum refers many matters to committees—charged, among other things, with overseeing the PA's promises. On these committees the United States is to play a prominent role.

Netanyahu had agreed to the 13-percent withdrawal even before Wye began (on the condition that, in order to help contain the security risks for Israel, three of the thirteen percentage points would remain virgin territory as a "nature reserve"). So the main subject of negotiations was what the Palestinian side was offering. Consistent with his theme of reciprocity, Netanyahu wanted terms that would position him strongly to decline further moves in the Oslo process if the PA continued to fail to perform its duties. Arafat wanted the opposite—an agreement without clear commitments or enforcement mechanisms.

At Wye, administration officials continually told the press that they were in harmony with the Palestinians. What they focused on was protecting the Oslo process from present and future disputes over compliance. In practice, this meant not curing existing violations or preventing future ones but suppressing and precluding *complaints* about them. Although this may sound irrational, or just plain cynical, it follows logically from the belief that in the Oslo process lies the key to peace. For how better to preserve that process—i.e., sustain the negotiations, produce new agreements—than by making it difficult if not impossible for the Israeli side to prove the Palestinian side's violations? And how accomplish *that* except by crafting an agreement that may appear sound but meticulously omits the kinds of terms that competent people routinely include in commercial contracts: verification of compliance, surety mechanisms to enforce obligations, and provisions for termination in case of material breach?

Such are the Wye accords—documents replete with undefined terms, unaddressed contingencies, unauthorized interpretations, loopholes, and lacunae (grammatical errors, too). To get a sense of them, one must read at least a few provisions in full. Here, for example, are the paragraphs providing for a nature reserve. My comments are in italics:

> The Palestinian side has informed that it will allocate an area/areas amounting to 3 percent from the above Area (B) to be designated as Green Areas and/or Nature Reserves.
>
> *When must this allocation occur? What happens if it is later rescinded?*
>
> The Palestinian side has further informed that they will act according to the established scientific standards,
>
> *What standards? Who is authorized to alter them?*
>
> and that therefore there will be no changes in the status of these areas,
>
> *If the "scientific standards" are altered, can the PA claim the right to change the areas' status?*
>
> without prejudice to the rights of the existing inhabitants in these areas, including Bedouins;
>
> *If the PA wants to build a road, for whatever*

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purpose, what is to prevent it from saying the road is needed in order to avoid prejudicing the rights of the existing inhabitants, thus nullifying the entire paragraph? *

while these standards do not allow new construction in these areas, existing roads and buildings may be maintained.

Why not say simply that the Palestinian side shall, by a date certain, allocate the 3 percent permanently as a nature reserve and that, without advance approval of the two sides, no new construction shall take place there?

Now here in full is the section on illegal weapons, of which there are large quantities in the areas under PA control.

(a) The Palestinian side will ensure an effective legal framework is in place to criminalize, in conformity with the prior agreements, any importation, manufacturing or unlicensed sale, acquisition or possession of firearms, ammunition or weapons in areas under Palestinian jurisdiction.

What are the standards for an "effective" legal framework? Who judges? What if the standards are lowered or ignored after Israel completes its 13-percent withdrawal?

(b) In addition, the Palestinian side will establish and vigorously and continuously implement a systematic program for the collection and appropriate handling of all such illegal items in accordance with the prior agreements. The U.S. has agreed to assist in carrying out this program.

What are the standards for assessing the adequacy of the PA's program? When does it begin? What does "implement" mean? Might Israel have to begin and perhaps complete its withdrawal before any direct action against terrorist groups is initiated? Even if direct action is taken early on, what are the consequences if it is halted or reversed a few months later? Will Israel then make a new agreement for additional withdrawals in return for PA reaffirmation of its Wye undertakings? Why not say, "The PA shall disarm within its area of control the terrorist organizations listed below. . ."?

(c) A U.S.-Palestinian-Israeli committee will be established to assist and enhance cooperation in preventing the smuggling or other unauthorized introduction of weapons or explosive materials into areas under Palestinian jurisdiction.

Why, again, is there no mention of particular action against any terrorist group? What about the importation by the PA itself of weapons impermissible under prior agreements, such as Katyushas and shoulder-fired rockets? What if the PA fulfills its duty to establish the committee, but reports it has not yet found an opportune time to disarm the terrorist cells? What if the PA informs the Americans that the Palestinian legislature refuses to approve action against illegal weapons? What commitment does Israel have from the United States in the event of unsatisfactory performance?

SIMILAR CRITICISMS apply to virtually every provision of the Wye Memorandum. Since the document, only nine pages long, was negotiated under the direct supervision of President Clinton, whose linguistic finesse has been well established in recent months, one cannot assume that its nonobligatory obligations and illusory promises are the result of inadvertence or of an inability to create nuance. No, the gaps and ambiguities were built in with care. They ensure that, down the road, Israel will not be able to establish easily or clearly that the Palestinians have violated their undertakings.

True, the Wye agreement includes a "time line," which breaks down each side's obligations into sequential steps, and Israeli officials have pointed to this feature as the agreement's key innovation. According to the Memorandum, indeed, the duties of the two parties "are to be carried out in a parallel phased approach" in accordance with the time line. But "parallel phased approach" is nowhere defined, and nowhere is it stated that any given step in the time line must precede any other. Nor is it specified that all steps in a given stage must occur before any obligations in a later stage become due.†

Netanyahu has said that he will halt the Israeli redeployments, scheduled to occur in three stages over a 90-day period, if the PA does not fulfill its undertakings according to the time line. But the Memorandum does not actually say that Israel has the right to do so. In recent years, when Israel has suspended

* Any student of Zionist history should have been sensitive to this phrase, for a similar proviso in the 1917 Balfour Declaration (about not prejudicing the rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine) was famously exploited by anti-Zionists to undermine the Declaration's principal purpose regarding the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine.

† In a side letter to Netanyahu, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright noted that "actions in each stage of the time line are to be completed by both sides before moving to the next stage." But it is unclear why this elaboration is absent from the Memorandum. Moreover, Albright's explanation itself contains a loophole: in referring to "actions" rather than "*the* actions," it implies that not necessarily all actions must be completed before the parties move to the next stage.

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withdrawals due to the other side's violations, the PA has turned the tables by asserting that Israel's suspensions constitute violations of Oslo.

In any event, even if the "parallel phased approach" plays out according to Netanyahu's concept, Israel will have completed its redeployments within a brief period. From that point forward, the time line affords Israel no leverage with the PA. However tough-minded the idea may have been in its initial conception, it emerged from the negotiations as a dubious mechanism for ensuring reciprocity.

AS IF mushy drafting did not offer a sufficient impediment to enforcement of the PA's promises at Wye, the agreement assigns to the U.S.—in fact, to the Central Intelligence Agency—a pivotal role in assessing the parties' compliance. To believe that the CIA will actually help enforce Wye is to misunderstand both the agency and American policy.

Over the decades, the CIA has collected much information relating to arms control and peace agreements. But when violations of those agreements need to be assessed, it is powerfully resistant to functioning either as judge or prosecutor. During the cold war, for example, Defense Department officials found it an exercise in pulling teeth to get the CIA to provide clear reports of how the Soviet Union was violating the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, the Biological Weapons convention, and other international agreements.

As soon as something is made the subject of a peace or arms-control treaty, ordinary intelligence reports on the matter become politically and diplomatically sensitive. To avoid being drawn into a highly politicized dispute, the CIA, which does not see itself as in the business of treaty-enforcement, hedges its reports, taking pains to highlight gaps in the data, ambiguities in the available evidence, uncertainties in its estimates. Even the limited and grudging cooperation the Pentagon extracted during the cold war is likely to be denied to Israeli officials responsible for upholding the Oslo peace process.

Moreover, the Clinton administration has no desire to expose the PA's record. Since the Oslo process began in 1993, the State Department has issued a series of congressionally-mandated compliance reports; in them, PA violations have been either minimized or ignored. Wye reaffirmed the administration's determination to preserve the process despite PA violations, and the CIA can hardly be expected to cast doubt on something the government favors so intensely.

That is not all. The new U.S. role—neutral monitor of an agreement between Israel and the PA—is at odds with the existing relationship between the two democracies. American statutes commonly designate Israel a "major non-NATO ally." It is an ally's function to side with its fellow ally against those who would attack and destroy it. The United States can be neutral between Israel and the PA only if it assumes that the PA does not intend to destroy the Jewish state. But such an assumption would, in and of itself, disqualify the United States as a neutral party.

As a practical matter, the more deeply the U.S. enters into the role of monitor, the more it will resist favoring Israel on various matters *not* governed by the Wye or Oslo agreements: for example, relocating the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. Anyone within the administration who might advocate a pro-Israel position on such an issue will encounter the objection that he is tainting the neutrality crucial to the role of monitor, which in turn is crucial to preserving the Oslo process. Over time, the putative value of apparent neutrality will encourage neutrality in fact.

That the U.S.-Israeli "special relationship" has already frayed was manifested at Wye in the recklessness with which American officials toyed with the PA's threats to issue a unilateral declaration of independence. Arafat has said that, if Israel is not sufficiently forthcoming in negotiations, he will declare statehood on May 4, 1999 (the date on which "permanent status" of the PA-controlled areas was scheduled to take effect according to the 1993 Declaration of Principles and the 1994 Gaza-Jericho agreement). Such an act, far beyond violating Oslo, has catastrophic potential. It could provoke a war with Israel that might end up involving other states and endangering a multiplicity of American interests.

Washington had every opportunity at Wye to make known its unshakable rejection of such an act. American officials, for example, could have demanded that, as part of the Wye Memorandum, the PA formally renounce a unilateral declaration of independence. Washington could have said that if the Palestinians were intransigent on this point, they would bear the blame for the talks' failure. (On other issues, Israel was admonished at Wye in just these terms.) At the very least, the administration could have asserted that any such declaration by the PA would be deemed an unfriendly act toward the United States as well as a material breach of the Oslo agreements that would relieve Israel of any of its obligations thereunder. Washington

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could have made clear that it would not recognize a unilaterally declared Palestinian state, would work to ensure that other countries withhold recognition, and would terminate U.S. aid to the PA-controlled territories.

But, despite Israel's request for help on this issue, all that the Clinton administration was willing to provide was a letter from U.S. Ambassador Edward S. Walker, Jr. to Israel's cabinet secretary Dani Naveh:

> [A]s regards to the possibility of a unilateral declaration of statehood or other unilateral actions by either party outside the negotiating process that prejudge or predetermine the outcome of those negotiations, the U.S. opposes and will oppose any such unilateral actions.

This is far short of a vow not to recognize a state, and it puts the Palestinian threat—a virtual declaration of war—in the same category as disapproved "unilateral actions" by Israel, like building towns for Jews in the territories or apartments at Har Homa in Jerusalem.

THIS, THEN, was the breakthrough that administration officials congratulated themselves on having achieved at Wye. Since it was concluded, what has happened has been much like what happened before: Israel has withdrawn from additional territory, and has permitted the PA to operate its own airport. PA officials have written up security plans for committee consideration, but meanwhile have disclaimed any intention of fulfilling key promises they made in October. Thus, one top-level PA official announced early on that "there will be no vote" to amend the PLO Charter; another publicly contradicted the PA's promises regarding the arrest of terror suspects; and a third, the PA police chief, detailed how he means to circumvent the PA's commitment at Wye to reduce its police forces.

Since Wye, Palestinian terrorists have remained on the job. One post-Wye operation targeted Jewish children in a school bus near Gaza, another the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem. And Palestinian newspaper articles and television broadcasts have continued repeatedly to condemn Israel—and Jews generally—in bigoted and incendiary language. On November 3, a religious program on the PA's official channel instructed viewers that "the Jews do not believe in God" and are "the seed of Satan and the devils." On November 7, the PA's official newspaper, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda*, told its readers: "Corruption is part of the nature of the Jews. . . . If one studies their history, it becomes apparent that the Jews were subjected to losses and expulsions as a result of their wickedness and their despicable acts." Other examples abound.

WYE IS said to have put Oslo back on track. So it has done—if by Oslo one means the whole history of one-sided Israeli concessions, of inflated Palestinian expectations, of Palestinian breaches of solemn undertakings, of Palestinian violence threatened and executed, and, crucially, of American rewards for Palestinian recalcitrance.

Oslo was meant to be an experiment. It was a test, in the aftermath of the cold war and the Gulf war, of whether peace might at last be available to Israel. It was a test, in other words, of PLO intentions. Whether or not Israel and the United States were prudent to embark on the experiment—to see whether land and authority provided by Israel would transform the PLO into a force for conciliation and against violence and war—the evidence, plentiful from the start, is now overwhelming that the experiment has failed. Building on the concessions Israel has already made, the PA has or will soon enjoy and undoubtedly exploit the capability to import weapons through its new air and sea facilities, to forge political alliances with the likes of Saddam Hussein, to protect terrorist organizations behind a wall of state sovereignty—in short, to continue its armed struggle to liberate all of Palestine.

Just as it has become increasingly clear that the dangers posed by Saddam Hussein in Iraq (as by Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and Kim Jung Il in North Korea) cannot be effectively contained so long as the present regime there remains in power, it should be plain that there will be no peace between Israel and the Palestinians until the latter enjoy a different and better leadership than the corrupt, violent, and irresponsible police-state regime of the PA. The ability of the United States (or of Israel) to promote improvement in that leadership is limited. But the administration's current policy—increasing U.S. aid to the PA while winking at its violations of Oslo and its human-rights abuses—simply reinforces the regime's most dangerous traits. Down that road lie further misery for the Palestinians and, for Israel, war.

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The Last Time I Saw Paris

André Aciman

In memory of Eric Breindel, a true friend.

MY ROMANCE with Paris begins, as one says of earthquakes, at an epicenter—surrounded by tall, turn-of-the-century buildings, a small empty park, and silent avenues. This is how I always pictured Paris as an adolescent, before ever seeing it. A *marchand de tabacs* who would sell me cigarettes without asking questions; a *pâpeterie* where I could buy a longed-for Pelikan pen; the smile of girls outside a vaguely imagined *lycée*; a secret rendezvous at the cinema.

Before I had ever set foot there, France was already my homeland, the place to which I knew I would eventually *return*. But everything stood in my way, starting with the fact that in the early 1960's, roughly the time of which I am speaking, my family was still living in Alexandria, Egypt, decades away from 1960's Paris. There were other inconvenient circumstances as well: many adult members of my family, although educated as French-speakers in the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, had somehow managed to become not French but Italian citizens. Then, too, I myself had gone to English schools throughout my childhood and hence knew English better than French—despite the fact that my mother tongue was French, which I spoke with a strange accent. (This was part of my problem all around, seeing that I spoke several languages with a French accent, except French.)

Here I was, a Jewish boy landlocked in Nasser's anti-Semitic Egypt, yearning to be back in a France I had never seen and did not even belong to. As we were losing our fortune, and the Egyptian police closed in on us with house inspections, harassing phone calls at night, anonymous letters, secret denunciations, what could be better than to sit at the window in my great-aunt's bedroom at night and imagine myself staring at the Seine—which, she never tired of telling me when she joined me and glued her forehead to the window pane, flowed ever so close to her old apartment in Paris? "Can you actually see the Seine from your windows?," I would ask. "No, but it's scarcely seven minutes away." And then she would recite the refrain of Guillaume Apollinaire's poem, *Le pont Mirabeau*:

> Let the night fall and the hours ring
> The days go away, I remain.
> (translation by Richard Wilbur)

It was of those "scarcely seven minutes away" that I kept thinking during my last months in Egypt as we sold what we could and packed the rest amid daily squabbles between my mother and her mother-in-law and an aunt who could not help tak-

ANDRÉ ACIMAN *teaches French literature at Bard College and is the author of a memoir,* Out of Egypt, *sections of which originally appeared in* COMMENTARY. *A somewhat different version of the present essay was delivered last fall at the Alliance Française in New York.*

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ing sides and always picked the wrong one. I learned to understand in the course of those days that there are places on the planet we simply must accept we shall never see again. I thought that place was Egypt. Little did I know that, as happens to men who repeatedly lose women for the same reason, there are families who will lose their homes at least once every generation.

I remember exactly the French authors, old and new, I was reading back then: Molière, François Mauriac, Alain-Fournier, Jean Anouilh, Georges Duhamel, Albert Camus. Like the window in my aunt's bedroom, they looked out onto what seemed the most distantly adjoining spot on earth. All I needed to do was read a sufficient number of pages and I could almost be there, in André Gide's Paris or Marcel Pagnol's Marseilles, the imagined sound of France blending with the perpetual yelling in Arabic that rose up to my room from the street below.

There was another book that appeared from nowhere one day, mixed in among the volumes my father had dumped in a pile in the packing room, a book I assumed he had no need of but later understood he must have left around in the manner of parents who want their sons to know certain things before they find out about them from more direct and less desirable sources. I devoured it, it devoured me. Each sentence opened up a world so vast and so thrilling that at the end of each night's perusal I wished I could forget everything I had just read so as to discover it afresh the next morning.

"You will find," I read on one of the pages, "that, when you're about fourteen or older, should you happen to be walking about at night, certain overdressed women may come up to you and ask you to accompany them. It is better that you do not."

I *was* fourteen. But who were these women, and why had none ever approached me? And why was I not already in France where overdressed women came up from under the cover of night and asked you to accompany them? I looked out the window at my imagined Seine with its imagined bridges and *quais* that stood seven minutes away from our new home. But this was not Paris; this was still Alexandria.

During our last days in Egypt I learned to my shock that our destination was not to be my imagined Paris but some down-to-earth, working-class neighborhood in Rome. Thus we ended up—my mother, my brother, and I, for my father still remained behind in Egypt—in Italy. We knew no one, barely spoke the language, and did not know where to shop, or how. At night, feeling totally hemmed in by this country we could not love or fathom, we would close the shutters to stave it off. But Italy would not go away: from the buildings surrounding our courtyard there came each evening the echo of an entire society tuned to the same television channel. Sometimes the noise arose from a nearby movie theater, which, on warm summer nights, opened its roof to allow us to hear the roar of laughter or the dubbed voice of Sean Connery. When school started that fall, our twilit street turned sordid, with its grimy groceries, the coffee merchant whose dark quarters looked more like a cave than a shop, the corner bar filling up with workers stopping for wine on the way home from work. How could this be my homeland?

Then came a miracle. My father, who after leaving Egypt had found a temporary job in France, summoned us for a two-week visit during the winter holiday break, *pour voir*, just to see. He made our visit seem a mere stopover, Paris on consignment. More than three decades later, I can remember what we did on each and every one of those fifteen days.

I remember my first visit to the Latin Quarter, where I went with my older girl cousins and their fiancés, all undergraduates and all, apparently, Parisians. On a rainy weekday afternoon we whizzed through narrow streets crowded into two tiny Citroën "*deux chevaux*" to catch a Humphrey Bogart revival. One of us jumped out to purchase tickets, another to find snacks, while the rest looked for parking places. After the movie we stopped at a café where everyone ordered tea.

Another day, on our way to buy cigarettes for everyone, my cousin took me into a record shop. She was looking for Bach's double-violin concerto. Sitting in a tiny booth, we stole a few minutes to listen to the recording with David Oistrakh as the principal soloist. She found it not to her liking. Did they have Menuhin? They did not. We went across the street, where they had neither Oistrakh nor Menuhin but they did have Heifetz—the best, according to the salesgirl. No, thanks. For the next two weeks, we listened to violinist after violinist. To this day the sound of the double concerto brings to mind those heady first encounters with Paris, when I watched for signs of snow that never came and fell in love with the cool grayness that settled over the city at teatime, presaging evenings when we would crowd into the car and tour Paris-by-night, invariably ending our adventure with crêpes, onion soup, and Vichy candies.

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Was it Paris or just the stuffed car and the good fellowship of cousins I had not seen in at least a decade that made me feel I was here to stay? The streets bustling with people my age who spoke my language; the spirited jokes; the movie theaters filled to capacity—this was not just the center of the world, or even the center of my life, it was me. It was my voice, if not when I spoke then something clearer and deeper, as when I laughed. Perhaps it was not even a voice but a manner of being in the world that made me love that world and, come to think of it, myself as well.

When after about four days we finally visited my great-aunt in the 16th *arrondissement*, it was like walking into our old home in Alexandria—smaller, to be sure, but the exact same *kind* of home: the same feel, the same smell, the same familial injunctions to be quiet and mind our manners. But this apartment was like a finished version of the rough sketch that had been our home in Alexandria. If Egypt was the base melody, Paris was the full orchestral score, an entire city beaming with the glory of a redeemed *déjà vu*. Like Saint Augustine thinking back to the time when he had not yet known God, only to wonder why he could not have loved Him sooner, so I too asked: why wasn't I born here, why can't I live here, when will it happen?

MY FATHER had said these two weeks were to be a tryout. But preliminaries were totally unnecessary. I was ready to settle in at a moment's notice. One night, in a tiny park not far from my great-aunt's, my father pointed out two girls in their mid-teens: "I'll bet you anything they live in the neighborhood; they probably go to Lycée Janson de Sailly." Immediately, I wanted to be in school.

I was too young to know how to seize any opportunities that might have come my way. But presentiments of romance were everywhere. From the way women looked at me, I could tell that this was a language whose syntax I already knew fluently; all I needed was the vocabulary. And then, of course, there were those overdressed women who under cover of night would surely come up and ask me to accompany them. They were the reason I could not wait for the chance to be on my own in Paris—no easy task, since so many relatives were hosting us. But my great-aunt finally gave me my opening. In her refrigerator, she liked to keep bottles of water taken from the Lamartine fountain down the block, an artesian well whose water Jacques Hillairet, in his *Dictionnaire Historique des rues de Paris*, had described as having an insipid taste ("*un goût fade*"). She assigned me the job of keeping them filled.

Never has anyone managed to turn so simple an errand into so time-consuming a task. There were always people at Square Lamartine, including others my age probably doing the same thing as I for their grandparents or parents. Wedged among them as I waited my turn at the fountain, I became not only a real Parisian but a young Jacob, waiting to meet his Rachel at the well of Beer-Sheba. Next time, I thought, as, day after day, I failed to muster the courage to speak. I came every day, sometimes twice, sitting on a bench and reading when the weather was not too cold, dawdling to watch the sun set and the last girls leave before dragging home the heavy bottles stuffed into two plastic net bags. Over tea one evening, my aunt said she was convinced I was smoking, while my grandmother opined that I was just slow and my mother that I must be losing my place to aggressive housewives. As for my father, he credited me with cunning schemes I let him think were successful.

When, by early January, it became clear that we had to return to Rome, I felt I would die before I could board the train. It was leaving on a Saturday evening, and would arrive in Rome on Sunday afternoon; on Monday we would be back in school. All I could think of on my last day at Lamartine was that Sunday evening in Rome—opening our suitcases, putting everything back in its dull place in an apartment from whose shuttered windows indelible sounds would make it impossible to imagine we were still in Paris, even though our suitcases would still smell of Paris, and the sound of Bach would remind me of Paris, as would the cheap pens with the sliding Eiffel Tower I was planning to buy before leaving or the punched métro ticket and the residual pack of Vichy candies stuffed inadvertently into my coat pocket and recovered weeks into our humdrum Roman lives. I thought of Square Lamartine and of the fountain that was right in front of me, but already no longer so. What in Egypt had seemed almost a dream had come to life, only to become a dream again.

Perhaps, I thought, in a few days, it would help to look back on this very moment and also on the weeks leading up to it, when I was still enjoying myself in Paris and was still unaware of the sorrow that inevitably comes from looking back. Perhaps, by rehearsing all this in advance, I might even, in some strange way, dull the pain. The fountain would stay, I would be gone. ("The days go away, I remain.") But at least I had anticipated it; at least I knew.

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At the Gare de Lyon, my father boarded the train to say good-bye. He urged me not to be sad: there would be many more chances to visit. I looked out the window. I had no way of knowing that this was only the first time I would think I was seeing Paris for the last time.

For the next three years, following my Christmas, Easter, and summer vacations, I would find myself on the same exact platform on a Saturday evening, saying good-bye to Paris, worrying lest my father not get off the train in time, trying to convince myself this had indeed been our last visit so as to ward off the hope and the disappointment whenever I would catch myself, later in Rome, wanting to be in Paris with nothing to turn to for consolation but my French books. Each time, in the days leading up to that parting moment at the Gare de Lyon, I would ask for very little of Paris—just a replay of my original heady two weeks. Like Stendhal, who would drop a little twig in a spring in Salzburg and return months later to find it covered with speckling crystals, I too would return to Paris to find that the memory of my first visit had been thoroughly crystallized in Square Lamartine.

Not a day went by that I failed to log my impressions there, the better to remember them in Rome, knowing that, by cheating Paris of its magic, by numbing the pleasure of the moment with constant reminders of the unavoidable trip back, I was mitigating, if not averting, the shock of departure. It was my way of preempting tomorrow's worries by making tomorrow seem yesterday, of warding off adversity by warding off happiness as well. In the end, I actually learned not to enjoy going to Paris, or even to enjoy being there—because I enjoyed it too much.

It drove my brother insane, this in-a-week-from-now-we'll-be-in-Rome-remembering-everything-we-said-and-did-in-Paris routine of mine. I was like a dying man taking detailed mental notes of sunlight, faces, foods, places, emotions, not only to remember them better when he reaches the hereafter but to give himself the impression of being still rooted in the past and capable of leaving a patch, an afterimage, like one of the shadows imprinted on the bridges of Hiroshima. To this day my brother knows Paris better than I ever will, although I know one tiny corner better than many Parisians. The Paris I cultivated was a Paris one need not stay in too long. It was a Paris made to be yearned for and remembered, a Paris for the mind.

One evening, many years later, on the way to my Paris hotel, I heard a voice behind me and turned to see a girl no older than nineteen come out of the dark and ask the question I would once have given anything to hear a woman say. I shrank back, as one does with a beggar who has come too close and to whom one hands a coin without touching hands. I had long ago learned to prefer the imagined encounter, or the memory of the imagined encounter, to the encounter.

Now, whenever I say good-bye to Paris, I do so without making trouble. At the airport, I do not think this is the last time I'll ever return. I am, I tell myself, happy to be going home. I open a book, talk to my fellow passengers, watch the news. I never, ever look back. Am I aware that the loves we decline to look back upon are those we are not certain we have overcome? In that sense, Lot was far guiltier than his wife: fleeing Sodom and Gomorrah, she just turned her head; he made a point not to.

The final irony is that I eventually learned to love Rome and, later, New York. Not just because they were homes of last resort—as with arranged marriages, these, I am told, make the best homes—but because in them, over the years, I have been able to find the shadow of an imagined and remembered Paris, one that never gels, and always hovers, forever transposed and forever unreal.

Thus, I look out from a friend's window on Riverside Drive, catch sight of a Circle Line boat moving up the Hudson, and before I can express a thought, my friend does it for me. "Oh, yes, we know, it's a *bâteau-mouche* on the Seine, and you're in Paris thinking of being on Riverside Drive longing to be in Paris."

Last Christmas, I called a close friend to let her know my wife and I would be away for a bit—we were going to Paris. In my usual manner I said I did not like traveling, I never found Paris relaxing, I would much rather stay in New York and imagine having wonderful dinners in Paris. "Yes, of course," she agreed, already annoyed. "Since you're going to Paris, you don't want to go to Paris. But if you were staying in New York, you'd want to be in Paris. But since you're not staying, but going, just do me a favor." Exasperation bristled in her voice. "When you're in Paris, think of yourself in New York longing for Paris, and everything will be fine."

And that is precisely what I did. We walked around, went to the stores, visited this or that place. But the one thing I wanted to do—namely, return to the Paris of my adolescence—I kept delaying because I could not rest until I had done it, but did not want to do it too soon. I knew that once I had revisited my sites, Paris would hold no further interest for me.

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My wife was hardly unfamiliar with this Paris of mine. I had brought her there ten years earlier on our honeymoon, and again three years later with our then-ten-month-old son. I had wanted to show her the house where my great-aunt lived, and the walks we sometimes took together, and the fountain where I would go with empty bottles to watch the girls.

I still remember how, on the first day of our honeymoon in Paris, walking along the grand avenues of the 16th *arrondissement*, staring at the lit-up buildings with their promise of intimate gatherings, I had begun to tell my wife about my first sojourn in Paris and of my thwarted love for the city to which I would return so often during my years in Rome, each time summoning up the memory of my prior visit or anticipating my next, leaving almost no room for the visit itself. We walked to the Place de Barcelone, stood and faced Pont de Grenelle, not far from Pont Mirabeau, and I pointed out the small-scale Statue of Liberty that is a reverse imitation of the one in New York, thinking to myself how things get boxed into each other and how cities and bridges and parks, like far-flung cousins, become mirror images of their replicas.

When we reached La Muette, one of my favorite spots, I told my wife about the royal falcon house after which the neighborhood is named—from the verb *muer*, to molt—and of how, centuries ago, this was where the king's birds were brought each year to shed their feathers. As we walked, I began to wonder what the opposite of molting was and why, unlike the body, which sheds everything, the soul cannot let go but compiles and accumulates, growing annual rings around the things it wants and dreams of and remembers. I already knew that in years to come I would turn back to this very evening at La Muette and remember how I had come there with my wife on our honeymoon and how, with her, I had remembered the young man who walked these same sidewalks trying to find a Paris he did not know he had invented.

And now, here we are on the same spot, no longer newlyweds, thinking to ourselves how much and how very little things have changed since our last visit. We are having a late lunch, in the exact same café on the Place du Trocadéro where we lunched a decade ago, and without thinking we have ended up ordering the same meal. I suspect my wife knows where we are headed, though I have not told her yet, nor have I told her that we are to visit not just the old building where my great-aunt lived but the tiny park as well.

The sky as always is a silver gray, and the city is in full ferment as we leave the café down the unavoidable route toward the old apartment. I recognize the silence that descends over that wonderful corner of the 16th *arrondissement* late on a weekday afternoon as children come home from school, bookbags and all, accompanied by a cluster of babysitters who trail behind as their charges scamper quietly ahead. And there—I do it each time—I look up to the fifth floor where my great-aunt and my grandmother used to live. I can still remember the last time I visited this building with my wife.

Of course, as my wife and I both know, I have already reported that self-same visit in my book, *Out of Egypt*. What makes the present situation all the more uncanny is that earlier today, wandering into one of my favorite foreign-language bookshops on the Rue de Rivoli, I had asked for the book—with studied nonchalance, as authors do. I wanted to find out whether they had the British paperback edition, which I had never seen. The salesclerk, who had no idea who I was, turned out to be familiar with the title but reported she could not locate the book on the shelves. I was browsing in another section entirely when suddenly she came rushing up. "*Monsieur*, I've found it!" Damn! Now I had to purchase my own book, or give away the fact that I had been "testing" the store.

So here I am, two hours later, walking with my own book in my hand in front of a building described in that book, feeling like Don Quixote in the second part of his novel, or like Wordsworth on revisiting Tintern Abbey, or like Saint-Simon holding in his hand the vile character portrait he had penned of the person on whom he was now lavishing compliment after compliment. I feel nothing. My wife, who in my book asks, "Didn't you ever want to go upstairs to visit?," does not speak her lines, and I cannot remember mine and clearly do not want to be caught looking them up now. So we leave the scene quite unsatisfied, knowing we will probably never do *this* again.

I ask my wife if she minds taking a walk around the vest-pocket park stuck in between the grand turn-of-the-century buildings. I feel like a child asking his harried parents to stop at the window of yet another toy store. But I am taking too long, I do not know what I am looking for, we are both jet-lagged and tired, and any moment now it may start raining. And still no epiphany, nothing, just this rushed, desultory prowling around what seems to be a little fountain in a *petit parc* that long ago was named Place Victor-Hugo and then became Square Lamar-

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tine. What was I looking for, anyway? Crestfallen, I accompany my wife to the nearest métro station.

Four days after our perfunctory visit, on the eve of our departure, I decide to come back alone. I make my rounds again, scouring the scene, trying to squeeze out a droplet of sensation. Nothing. All I remember is coming here four days earlier. It is five o'clock. I could—and the thought races through my mind before I can check it in time—call ahead and then go upstairs for tea.

Last summer I returned yet again to Square Lamartine, this time with my seven-year-old son. I showed him where I had lived when I was barely seven years older than he, took pictures of him in front of my great-aunt's building just as I had done with my wife on our honeymoon, then walked around a bit, snapping the park, him playing in the tiny enclosure by the sandbox, the adjoining buildings, knowing that one day, his passage here, like my wife's, my brother's, my father's, my great-aunt's, and mine would find a place in this concentric planisphere named Square Lamartine.

My son is playing in the park. There is, of course, no way for him to know what I am thinking. But I am standing there the way my father did when he would take me as a child to his father's grave in Alexandria because there was no one he would rather be with at that moment. Except that, in my case, I have accompanied my son not so much to a gravesite as to the resting place of a part of my life that was never even lived, a chapter written in invisible ink. In Lamartine's garden I am still combing the scene, looking for ancient relics and clues, not just memories but generations of memories, deep, artesian memories, the way police inspectors in the movies pick up hair, nails, and lint and drop them with a tweezers into a handkerchief, the way people scour the beaches on summer evenings looking for jewelry that was lost not just that day but many summers before.

As I stare at this tiny park, I think to myself of all I have logged away and why I always feel as though nothing, even when written, remains fixed for too long before it starts to rise from the page, as if it had been but figuratively buried in paper and now aches for life again. I have never learned either to live things or else to let them go.

As if to rescue myself from so disturbing a thought I suddenly remember a literary character I have not brought to mind since leaving Italy three decades ago. It is a character named Astolph from *Orlando Furioso*, the 16th-century epic poem by Ariosto. This Astolph lands on the moon—in the poem, a giant lost-and-found, bric-a-brac landscape containing everything that was ever lost or ever wished for but never granted. Mankind's unrealized artifacts litter the lunar surface, and you must thread your way cautiously through the rubble, for vials containing stolen goods and unhatched schemes crackle underfoot, and wasted years and abandoned hopes are strewn about everywhere.

Like Astolph wandering in search of the flask that contains the sanity misplaced by Ariosto's hero Orlando, what I knew I would find here in this quiet landscape was my whole Paris: the crowded Citroën with my cousins—it was there—the hunt for Bach's double-concerto—it, too, was there—my love for the métro, Apollinaire's poem, the Bogart revival, the smell of cigarettes and damp wool coats, the girls whose gaze was unlike any I had met before, the woman who finally came out of the dark only to be shooed away, the plays, the brasseries, the books, down to the late afternoon tea I had conjured the day I came without my wife and thought I was a phone call away from people who had died so long ago, the light drizzle on silver gray days when Paris is awash in traffic lights, my first walk down by the royal falcon house, the day it finally dawned on me that my life had not even started, or that life, like Paris, was little else than a collection of close calls and near misses and that the objects I loved and would never outgrow and wished to take with me would always litter *this* landscape because they were lost or had never existed, because even the life I had yearned to live when looking out the window with my great-aunt in Alexandria and dreaming of a Seine scarcely seven minutes away was also cast upon this landscape, a past life, a pluperfect life, a conditional life, a life made, like Paris, for the mind. Or for paper.

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OBSERVATIONS

Among the Gender Benders

Wendy Shalit

AFTER ALMOST three decades of boil and bubble, the academic field of women's studies has not only cooked down but has been served up and thoroughly ingested. In 700 or so undergraduate and graduate institutions around the country, women's-studies programs boast their own tenured faculty and produce their own voluminous literature. This literature is readily divisible into two principal genres: the theoretical tract, and the first-person-singular sexual narrative.

For the most part, works in the former category are devoted to proving that all differences between men and women are "socially constructed" and, even more energetically, to disproving the opposite belief, labeled "biological determinism" or "essentialism"—the belief, that is, that biological differences exist or, worse still, matter. In the anti-essentialist world view, little boys and girls are not male and female; rather, they can be arranged along a continuum displaying, in the words of one professor of women's studies, their relative "commitment to hegemonic femininity and masculinity." The good news is that, if caught early enough, one's hegemonic commitment to a sex—especially the male sex—can be reversed.

As for the second genre, sometimes called the "herstory" tradition, this sets itself in counterpoise to *his*tory, which records such things as wars, political successions, and similarly unedifying matters. The object of "herstory" is "the removal of male self-glorification from history" (Midge Lennert and Norma Willson, 1973). This it accomplishes by offering "accounts of the human past and human activity that consider women as being at the center of society, not at the margins" (Anne Forfreedom, 1983). Such accounts can range across the totality of human experience, but in practice they often consist of the author's "celebrating" her own sexuality by writing about what she did and with whom. (Naming names is particularly revered as a "transgressive" act.)

Of the two types, the personal sexual narrative has become the more popular, lapping out of the academy and into better bookstores everywhere. And little wonder. It is not just that anti-essentialist theorizing is utterly false to reality, though it is certainly that. No lesser a problem is the prose in which anti-essentialist arguments are invariably couched. Here, for instance, is Judith Butler, a professor of humanities at Johns Hopkins and a veritable goddess in the anti-essentialist world for her 1990 work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, urging her readers to

> consider not only that the ambiguities and incoherences with and among heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual practices are suppressed and redescribed within the reified framework of the disjunctive and asymmetrical binary of masculine/feminine, but that these cultural configurations of gender confusion operate as sites for intervention, exposure, and displacement of these reifications.

It does not help matters that Professor Butler has steadfastly

WENDY SHALIT *is a contributing editor of* City Journal *and the author of* A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue, *which has just been published by the Free Press.*

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bristled at attempts to make her explain what she means—or, rather, to "linguistify [her] positionality." And so one can hardly blame readers for preferring the likes of Naomi Wolf, Kathryn Harrison, or Joyce Maynard. Each of them has been only too ready to linguistify her positionality, horizontal and otherwise.

Yet, truth to say, the tell-all genre has its limitations as well, having mainly accomplished a task one might once have thought impossible—rendering the obscene boring, and the salacious banal. Still, not to despair: as if to rescue a terminally devolving situation, we have lately been graced with what may seem like a new feminist genre but is really a hybrid, melding the best of anti-essentialism with the best of "herstory." Enter two new books, one by a novelist, the other by a professor.

THE NOVELIST is Catherine Texier, and her offering is *Breakup: The End of a Love Story*,* written after her husband of eighteen years left her for another woman. Although born in France, Texier seems not to have heard how sophisticated the French are about matters adulterous. She thinks her husband's adultery is a very big deal—so big that she must write about it, lest "our life together . . . vanish without a trace. So that there will be a record."

The "record" is a short, stream-of-consciousness affair cobbled into five chapters and shuttling back and forth from the breakup, to the first time Texier met the man who would become her husband and then her ex-husband, back to the breakup, then to the couple's daughters (who have ended up in the clutches of their father's new "friend"), and finally back again to the breakup. In this way the book not only tells the story of one woman's emotional gyrations but faithfully, all too faithfully, mimics them.

What makes *Breakup* an example of the new form becomes clear early on. As a young couple, Catherine and her husband had been editors of a bohemian literary magazine, *Between C & D*. She had fallen in love with him, she writes, because he was "a flirt, a child-man, a free spirit, a pure artist who would never take a straight job." Wanting him to be "wild, and irresponsible, and free," she hoped they "*could take turns being male and female*" (emphasis added), thus breaking free of those old essentialist bogeypersons.

The result, alas, was disaster. Not that her husband failed at first to oblige. Rather, he obliged too well, by becoming a "wuss." And then he decamped. Which was worse, Texier finds it difficult to say. Among his many faults, catalogued with painstaking precision, in his career as a "wuss," we are told that he employed an expensive hatmaker and left his toe-fungus cream on the bedside table; also that his muscles deteriorated. But when he finally did the man thing and split, *she* was left "holding the home together, keeping the hearth going, so to speak. It's a traditionally feminine task that I never thought I would take to." Was ever anti-essentialism more confounded?

Unfortunately, Catherine Texier never answers this question or any question like it; her book is rather shorter on analysis than one might wish (not that one would wish it longer). But in any case, a more substantial treat awaits in *An Unconventional Family* by Sandra Lipsitz Bem,† a professor of psychology and women's studies at Cornell. Bem often writes about her children, her husband, and herself, and since the early 70's has held herself up as an expert practitioner of nonsexist child-rearing. "Like many feminist scholars," she explains in *An Unconventional Family*, "I live my life with little separation between the personal, the professional, and the political. My theory and my practice are thus inextricably intertwined."

The contents of *An Unconventional Family* certainly confirm this claim. Part One, "Coming Together," tells the story of how Sandra met her husband Daryl ("Courtship"), followed by an analysis of their dating career ("Why Daryl?"). In Part Two, "Writing Our Own Script," Bem gives us a tour of her anti-essentialist ideology, deconstructing each "phase" of its implementation in her own family; thus, we have a chapter on "Egalitarian Partnering," another on "Feminist Child-Rearing," and, as an extra added attraction, a blow-by-blow account of her personal battles in academia ("My Unorthodox Career"). Finally, in Part Three, "Evaluating Our Experiment," Bem interviews her two grown children, Jeremy and Emily, prodding them to assess "what the consequences were for [them] of our so consciously trying to raise them in a gender-liberated, anti-homophobic, and sex-positive way."

All parents have hopes for their children, but Sandra Bem had specific ones. She is, after all, the author of *The Lenses of Gender* (1993), a book which argues "that in order to interrupt the social reproduction of male power, we need to dismantle not only androcentrism and biological essentialism but also gender polarization and compulsory heterosexuality." So it is not surprising to learn in *An Unconventional Family* that when young Sandra met young Daryl—she was then a senior psychology major at Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh—what she "loved" most was this: "The fact that he was male and I was female had not seemed to be part of our chemistry."

Soon after their wedding in 1965—in the great tradition of untraditional marriages, the pair performed the ceremony themselves—Sandra and Daryl Bem vowed to "function as truly egalitarian partners." Not only did Sandra know "there was no way I would be willing to do what I presumed a good wife was supposed to do for her hus-

* Doubleday, 159 pp., $19.95.

† Yale University Press, 209 pp., $20.00.

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band: namely, wash his floor, darn his socks, cook his meals, raise his children." She even took pride in quashing Daryl's job offers, and taught him to take pride in it as well: "This loss of total independence gave Daryl a moment's pause . . . , but he quickly recovered, and we excitedly moved on to framing an egalitarian philosophy." Before long, the two lovebirds were featured in *Ms.* magazine, where a confident Sandra declared that "I believe we are unlikely to get divorced."

As for the children, those little "gender pioneers," Sandra alternated with Daryl as the parent "on-duty." A sign in the kitchen signified to little Jeremy and Emily whose turn it was to be responsible for them, with two pointy breast marks on a figure signifying "mommy's turn," a figure with one pointy crotch mark signifying "daddy's turn." To liberate them from the tyranny of "the culture's sex-and-gender system," Bem writes, "we never allowed there to be a time . . . when they didn't know that some people had partners of their own sex and other people had partners of the other sex." Sandra and Daryl "censored" (her word) certain books and television programs with inappropriate "gender" messages, and, when all else failed, used white correcting fluid to change pronouns in books from male to female.

At the Bems', everyone often traipsed around in the buff. Sandra made a point of "putting tampons in and taking them out" in front of the children to demonstrate that women's blood was not "yucky," and the children were encouraged to "experiment sexually" in the privacy of their third-floor bedrooms. Experimenting intellectually, however, was another matter. When little Jeremy demanded that the pages of a book he was being read from be flipped over rapidly so that he could yell out the numbers, his mother became alarmed. Jeremy's "mathematical giftedness," as she puts it, had all the earmarks of a "nightmare. After all, mathematics is a field in which few American women have yet entered the highest levels, and that gender disparity could have easily made Jeremy even more disrespectful of women's intelligence." Luckily, by the time his parents were through with him, little Jeremy was so gender-liberated he had come to think the word "heorshe" was an English pronoun.

GIVEN THEIR parents' ideological weirdness, it is a relief to report that the Bem children, both now in their early twenties, have ended up surprisingly normal. True, they have tried to fulfill their parents' expectations: Emily does not shave her body hair, and Jeremy still dons a skirt on occasion—just as he once wore barrettes to nursery school. But, as we learn in the final chapter, Emily mostly dates boys, wears makeup, and keeps a doll collection, while Jeremy admits that "I can't really say I've transcended gender" (though it still "bothers" him that he is interested in "conventionally gendered" topics like "math and computer programming and physics").

Jeremy, in fact, rebukes his mother for her child-rearing practices. "If you were doing it all over again," she dutifully records him as saying, "I would advise you to make it clearer to me that it's okay to have conventional desires as well as unconventional ones." Emily, for her part, complains that her mother made her feel "unnatural to be a girl." Does this give Sandra pause? Does it make her think there might be something to this "nature" business after all? Not for the merest moment. She and her husband, she (manfully?) concludes, must have been "much more gendered as parents than [we] had intended."

Nor, it turns out, is this the only unexpected development to have tested the resilience of the Bem doctrine. Reader, it seems that Daryl and Sandra are no longer married. Nowhere near enough is made of this startling disclosure, which is mentioned only in passing; but perhaps the base facts are enough. "We did split up about four years ago," Bem writes, "and both of us became involved in relationships with people of our own sex."

A failure for the couple who once voted themselves most "unlikely to divorce"? Far from it: a crowning achievement. True, the Bems "are no longer close-coupled"—*close-coupled?*—but "Till death do us part is not the only—or even the best—criterion of whether and how we met our goals." After all, they intended from the beginning to "provide at least one concrete example of an alternative to the traditional heterosexual family." By running off with members of their own sex, they have carried their program to its triumphant conclusion.

Yes, anti-essentialism is a wonderful thing, as the doyennes of women's studies have long maintained. Just ask Jeremy and Emily.

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MOVIES

Terrorism at the Multiplex

Joshua Muravchik

THIS PAST November, Muslim and Arab-American organizations staged protests at movie theaters around the country to coincide with the opening of *The Siege*, a 20th Century Fox thriller that depicts a series of terrorist bombings in New York followed by the forcible internment of the city's male Arab inhabitants. Complaining that *The Siege* "portrays Arabs and Muslims as a homogeneous, threatening mass," Hala Maksoud, president of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), called the film "dangerous and incendiary" and warned of its potential to lead to "harassment, intimidation, discrimination, and even hate crimes" against Arab-Americans.

Because this was, in the boast of the studio, "one of the biggest films ever shot in the Big Apple," and because of the extreme sensitivity these days to anything smacking of ethnic bigotry, the controversy drew considerable attention. A reporter for the *Washington Post*, in a front-page story, wondered aloud about the likely reaction to a movie portraying Orthodox Jews or Catholic priests in similar terms. The film's leading actor, Denzel Washington, sounded a note of sympathy with the protesters, telling the *Toronto Star*, "There are Jewish terrorists but nobody would associate them with their religion." And the *New York Times* ran a debate on its op-ed page between the film's producer, Edward Zwick, and a spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the other main sponsor of protests.

Zwick's reply to his critics took two tacks. On the one hand, he invoked with some bravado the freedom of the artist. "What I'm trying to do as a filmmaker," he wrote, "is to look at the world. And write about what I see. . . . I'm sorry if I offended anyone. But I'm really not." Yet, on the other hand, he insisted that the true message conveyed by the film was quite the opposite of what the ADC and CAIR took it to be. If *The Siege* has a "single . . . conclusion," Zwick averred, it is that

> it is impossible to generalize about Arab-Americans, [and] that the distinction between them and terrorists must be understood before we, as a nation, can grapple with our fear of the "other."

In other words, "*The Siege* is not about terrorism; it's about us."

Even before the movie was completed Zwick had, in fact, taken extraordinary pains to propitiate any who might be offended, going so far as to furnish the ADC and CAIR with copies of the script and inviting them to suggest changes. A number of these suggestions were duly acted upon; thus, a scene in which a New York taxi driver of Middle Eastern background refuses to pick up Denzel Washington was excised from the final cut. Only when he was asked to change the identity of the bombers from Muslims to members of an American militia group did Zwick draw the line.

For their part, although they did not deny Zwick's benign intentions, the protesters insisted that his message would be lost on most viewers, who would be left with a reinforced association between terrorism and Arabs or Muslims. And in this they had a point, although a more

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK, *whose article, "Nerve Gas, Lies, and Videotape," appeared in our September issue, is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.*

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complicated one than they themselves realized.

WITH ITS thousands of extras and its on-scene production in Brooklyn and midtown Manhattan, *The Siege* does vividly succeed in creating an image of a world capital in the throes of escalating terror. In charge of combating this campaign, whose purpose is to compel U.S. authorities to release the leader of a radical Islamic group, is Anthony "Hub" Hubbard (Denzel Washington), head of an FBI task force. He soon discovers that he is not the only federal official on the case. A winsome CIA operative (Annette Bening), with deep and murky ties to the Muslim world, is working her own game. The simultaneously cooperative and competitive relationship between these two sexy characters gives the film much of its dramatic power.

Their investigations yield little, however. And so the President, spurred by narrow-minded Senators, orders the military in. Under the command of General Devereaux (Bruce Willis), tanks fill the streets of Brooklyn, and the male Muslim population is rounded up. Caught in the government dragnet is Frank Haddad, Jr., the fourteen-year-old son of Hub's chief deputy. The elder Haddad (played by Tony Shalhoub) is a Shiite Arab-American of unflinching patriotism, without a shred of sympathy for the miscreants with whom he shares common roots. (His anguish over the detention of his boy drives home the moral message about the dangers of stereotyping that Zwick alluded to in the *New York Times*.) Although not even Hub can secure Frank Jr.'s release from General Devereaux's megalomaniacal grip, in the end he does save all, shooting the last terrorist before he can stage a final horrific bombing and then facing down and arresting Devereaux in a gunpoint confrontation.

As a movie, *The Siege* barely meets even today's low standards for thrillers. Zwick's co-producer, Lynda Obst, has said that "Ed and I liked the material's verisimilitude," but the verisimilitude begins and ends with the postulating of terrorist activity in America. Particularly ludicrous are the American officials—CIA and FBI agents, military officers, Senators, and others—who populate *The Siege*. Not an aspect of their behavior or a line of their dialogue—to say nothing of Denzel Washington's virtuoso trigger finger—bears any resemblance to the way such people act and speak. The worst offender in this regard may be Bruce Willis, whose performance, in contrast to that of Washington and Bening, has been widely panned. But in fairness to Willis, it is hard to imagine how anyone could bring to life a character as absurdly drawn as General Devereaux.

This brings us to the heart of the matter. Zwick is right to say that *The Siege* does not assign the role of villain to Arabs or Muslims *per se*. Instead, it assigns that role to the U.S. military and the CIA. The relation of bad guy to good guy is epitomized in *The Siege* by a scene in which General Devereaux strips, tortures, and summarily executes an Arab-American who turns out—thanks to the incompetence of the CIA—to be a false suspect. Even the small band of Islamic terrorists are, in their own way, victims of the same evil force, having been trained in terror and then betrayed and abandoned by the CIA itself. It is this betrayal that drives the remnant first to attack American targets in the Middle East and then finally to resort to terrorism on American soil—but only after their holy leader has been illegally snatched by secret operatives of the power-mad General Devereaux, and only after their use of nonlethal methods to gain his release meets with rebuff.

In sum, *The Siege* is, as charged, an exercise in stereotyping. The objects of the stereotyping, however, are not Arabs or Muslims but Hollywood's favorite bogeymen. No wonder Zwick seemed bewildered by the accusations aimed at him by ADC and CAIR.

Still, they may be right that many viewers will take from the film something different from the message Zwick was trying to convey. For all his efforts to shift the burden of blame, the movie's image of a U.S. military run amok comes across as an overworked caricature. As against it, the image of Middle Eastern terrorists wreaking havoc in the streets of America is both compelling and only too plausible.

ACCORDING TO the groups protesting *The Siege*, terrorism is an activity distributed more or less evenly among nations and peoples. This equal-opportunity notion is also, presumably, what Denzel Washington had in mind in referring to "Jewish terrorists," and Zwick himself has made a similar point. "Terrorism," he says, "exists in the Jewish religion and the Catholic religion and in all religions as well."

Is the point valid? Invoking the State Department's annual report, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, CAIR spokesmen point out that, in 1997, 97 out of 123 anti-American attacks were listed as having occurred in Latin America, while relatively few occurred in the Middle East. But as the report itself explains, most of the incidents in Latin America "consisted of low-level bombings of multinational oil pipelines in Colombia," while, of "the more significant attacks during the year," the top six were carried out by Muslim groups. Half of the 36 terrorist organizations mentioned in the report, moreover, are Muslim. Most important, five of the seven states designated as sponsors of terror—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and Syria—are also Muslim. (The other two are Cuba and North Korea.)

This is not to suggest that terrorism is endemic ethnically to Arabs or doctrinally to Islam. But it does underline the fact that terrorism has enjoyed a prevalence and

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acceptance in the Muslim Middle East that have no parallel elsewhere. The five named states do not merely give succor to a variety of terrorist groups; they actively employ terrorism as an instrument of statecraft, often using their diplomats and embassies for terrorist activities. Rarely, moreover, have these states been condemned by their brother states. Indeed, other Arab and Muslim nations, including Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Yemen, and Afghanistan, have themselves given support to terrorist groups on occasion.

Contrast this with the situation in other places. Although terrorist cells have arisen in Germany, Italy, Japan, and even Israel, in each of these countries they have been anathematized and placed outside the law. Nowhere do they openly maintain offices or enjoy respect as they do in numerous Arab capitals. In fact, European and Japanese terrorist groups, isolated in their own countries, have turned to the Arab world for arms-training and haven.

The foremost beneficiary of the Arab states' indulgence of terrorism has of course been the Palestine Liberation Organization. In *The Siege*, the cold-blooded execution of an Arab suspect by a haywire U.S. general is pure fiction. In real life, two U.S. diplomats held hostage in Khartoum were executed in just this fashion by the PLO, apparently at the direct order of Yasir Arafat. Nothing in the PLO's record, however, ever caused the Arab nations to hesitate for a single moment before proclaiming it "the sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people. In fact, the PLO has long enjoyed the status of a *cause célèbre* among Arabs and Muslims; ironically, only now that it has officially renounced terrorism to pursue the Oslo peace process has it lost its standing with the likes of Iran.

There is a significant wrinkle here. Since some Arab states are themselves victims of terror (most notably, in recent years, Algeria and Egypt), the Arab League in 1996 adopted an "anti-terrorism agreement" aimed at strengthening cooperation against domestic threats. Yet while its first section denounces "terrorist crimes," its second explains that "cases of struggle by all means, including armed struggle, against foreign occupation and aggression for the sake of liberation and self-determination in accordance with the principles of international law are not considered crimes." As spelled out by Dr. Mustafa 'Abd-al-Hamid Karah, speaking for the council of Arab ministers of interior, this means that "it is not possible to regard the operations mounted by the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad organization against the forces of Zionist occupation as acts of terrorism." Nor has the existence of the anti-terrorism pact prevented the Arab League from recently proclaiming "solidarity with Libya in its just position" on the proposed trial of Libyan agents for the 1988 downing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. According to the prevailing stand of the Arab world, in other words, terrorism is not inherently wrong; it is, rather, a matter of whose ox is being gored.

Nevertheless, should Americans of Arab descent or of the Islamic faith be tarred with the brush of others' lamentable record concerning terrorism? In her open letter to Zwick, ADC president Maksoud beseeched Fox studios "to portray Arab-Americans for who they really are—honest, hardworking, and law-abiding citizens who make valuable contributions to our nation." And the film duly makes clear its sympathy with this point of view. At one juncture, Hubbard, the FBI man, announces that leaders of the Arab-American community "want these criminals brought to justice just as much as we do." Later, even as hate crimes against Middle Easterners multiply, a character identifying himself as a spokesman for the ADC proclaims: "Whatever injustices my people may be suffering at this moment, we will continue to show our commitment to this country."

Undoubtedly, Maksoud's description of the generality of Arab and Muslim Americans is accurate. But the advocacy groups that speak in their name, including the groups that have protested against *The Siege*, have been considerably more equivocal than the film portrays them. Although they do condemn terrorist attacks against the United States, and several have even condemned bombings in Israel, these statements are typically ringed about with caveats to the effect that U.S. retaliation is equally wrong, or that the attacks have been provoked by Israeli obduracy.

On the whole, indeed, the position taken by groups like CAIR and ADC echoes that of the Arab states. According to a report in an ADC publication, for example, Maksoud herself has

> emphasized the need to differentiate between legitimate acts of resistance which are sanctioned by international law, and acts of terrorism which take the lives of innocent civilians. She [has] warned against accepting Israel's definition of terrorism at face value, instead advocating recourse to the law of nations, which recognizes the legitimacy of the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance against occupation.

In the same vein, Maksoud has found "shocking" a journalist's description of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, characterizing it, instead, as a "resistance organization engaged in the legitimate defense of Lebanese land." (Hezbollah, according to the State Department, is "known or suspected to have been involved" in acts ranging from the October 1983 suicide truck bombing of the American embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut, to the kidnapping of American and other

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hostages in Lebanon, to the 1992 attack on the Israeli embassy in Argentina.) On other occasions, the ADC has objected to the inclusion of Syria on the list of countries supporting terrorism and, together with the National Association of Arab Americans, campaigned against two 1997 amendments forbidding most financial transactions with state sponsors of terrorism.

For its part, CAIR is, if anything, even more equivocal about terrorism than the ADC. Its executive director, Nihad Awad, declared at a 1994 conference that although he "used to support the PLO," he was now "in support of the Hamas movement more than the PLO."

To complete the picture, ADC, CAIR, and other Arab-American and Muslim advocacy groups have taken up the cudgels in behalf of one after another Arab-American facing legal action in connection with terrorism. Thus, CAIR denounced the deportation, on the basis of classified evidence, of Mazzen al-Najjar, the director of the World and Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE) in Tampa, Florida. This group had come under government scrutiny after al-Najjar's predecessor, Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, left Tampa in 1995 to take up a position as the head of Islamic Jihad. In a 1996 study of some 300 "anti-Muslim incidents" in the United States, CAIR listed the detention on American soil of Mousa Abu Marzuk, the leader of Hamas, as well as aspects of the trial and detention of Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman. The latter was the mastermind behind the plot to blow up major buildings and tunnels in New York and perhaps behind the World Trade Center bombing as well—acts, that is, of the very kind that give the images in *The Siege* their verisimilitude.

Undoubtedly, Americans of Arab and Muslim background experience discrimination and bias. While American society provides many avenues of redress for individuals denied their rights, derogatory stereotypes are more difficult to exorcise. Those protesting *The Siege* seem to think a complete ban on the subject of Middle Eastern terrorism will do the trick, but as long as the reality endures, nothing is likely to dispel the image in people's minds.

An end to Middle Eastern terrorism is a matter beyond the power of the Arab-American majority to effect. The majority can, however, counteract stereotypes by opposing forthrightly and condemning unequivocally vicious acts done in the name of a shared heritage. In this, the Arab and Muslim Americans so poignantly evoked by Hala Maksoud are ill-served not by *The Siege*, whose scurrility is aimed not at them but at American institutions, but by the very people who organized the protests against it.

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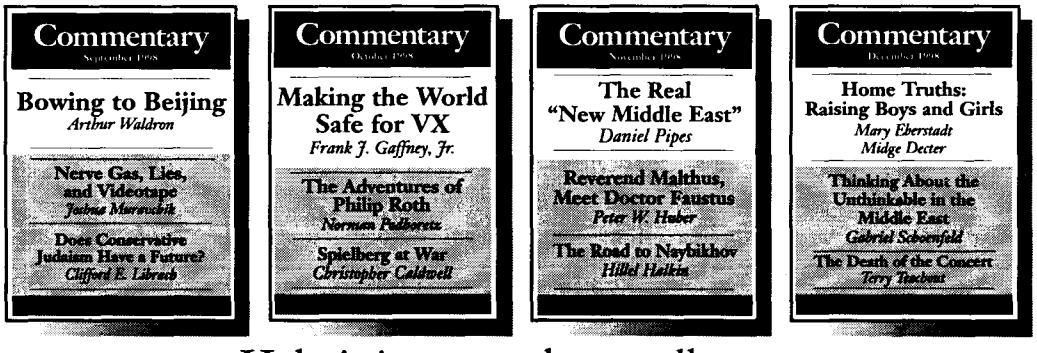

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Books in Review

First in Flight

Lindbergh
by A. Scott Berg
Putnam. 628 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Sam Tanenhaus

In an era of staged events and planned spectacles, it is almost impossible to imagine what so many millions felt on May 21, 1927, when the news came that a tiny silver aircraft had broken through the morning fog west of Ireland and was pushing on toward Paris. Since Charles A. Lindbergh's takeoff from New York City in the *Spirit of St. Louis* the day before, there had been no word of the plane and its pilot. "While Lindbergh later said that no man before him had commanded such freedom of movement over earth," A. Scott Berg writes in his new biography, "he failed to note that no man before him had ever been so much alone in the cosmos."

Of course, the instant Lindbergh landed at Le Bourget airfield outside Paris, the sublime solitude ended. The twenty-five-year-old aviator was swept up in a wave of public adoration. When he returned home, courtesy of the U.S. Navy, the entire nation seemed to be waiting at dockside. In Manhattan, more than four million people lined the streets to see him, and within three weeks, Berg reports, "an estimated 7,430,000 feet of newsreel had recorded his movements." Lindbergh had become "the most celebrated living person ever to walk the earth."

Like so many of his generation's great figures, he came from the Midwest. His father, Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr.—"C.A.," as he was called—was a Swede raised in rural Minnesota, a self-made man who put himself through law school and then started a thriving practice in the town of Little Falls. After C.A. won election to Congress as a Republican in 1907, Charles, then aged two, joined his mother in seasonal migrations between Washington and the heartland. It was a haphazard existence. By the age of eighteen, Lindbergh had attended no fewer than ten schools, passing through them as an indifferent pupil and avid daydreamer, too much the nomad to collect enduring friends.

After flunking out of the University of Wisconsin, Lindbergh found his home—in the sky. "Sharp-sighted and coordinated, with quick reflexes, [he] proved to be a natural pilot," Berg writes. He soon developed a missionary devotion to aviation, applying himself diligently to problems of aeronautics and design.

Though a relative novice when he decided to join the select handful of "flying fools" competing to make the first nonstop trans-Atlantic flight, Lindbergh was surreally confident. Experts said the trip would require two pilots, as no single man could possibly remain alert over the day and a half needed to complete it. Lindbergh, however, preferred to fly solo: a second pilot would mean added weight, and every available ounce was needed for fuel. Thus, his plane—built from

Sam Tanenhaus *is an editor at the* New York Times *op-ed page. His* Whittaker Chambers, *winner of the 1997* Los Angeles Times *book prize for biography, is available in paperback from the Modern Library.*

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scratch to his deeply pondered specifications—was little more than an aerial gas tank. He declined even to install a radio since the primitive equipment always seemed to break down when needed most.

The silly nickname he acquired, "Lucky Lindy," was completely wrong. Lindbergh left nothing to chance. He "compiled endless lists," writes Berg: "equipment he would need; maps he would have to study; landmarks he would have to learn; and information he would need from the Weather Bureau and the State Department." He plotted the 3,000-mile route himself, then recalculated it trigonometrically. So precise were these figurings, and so skilled a pilot was he, that when, after twenty hours in the air, he leaned out of the cockpit to yell to fishing boats 50 feet below, "Which way is Ireland?," he was less than three miles off course. For food he packed five sandwiches, explaining laconically, "If I get to Paris I won't need any more, and if I don't get to Paris, I won't need any more, either."

OF THE many sobriquets applied to him, "Lone Eagle" was the most apt. The first modern celebrity, he resisted the cheap trappings of success, spurning offers worth over $1 million from Hollywood, vaudeville, and hucksters of every kind. He learned early to avoid the press, which he loathed, remaining incorruptibly private, his own man.

Still, Lindbergh could not escape his fame, and it exacted a singular price. The public's insatiable appetite for gossip, cynically fed by newspapers, was to blame, he was sure, for the most terrible event in his life—the 1932 kidnapping and murder of his twenty-month-old son, quickly dubbed the "crime of the century." Almost as shocking as the act itself was the grisly media spectacle of the trial. The ordeal for Lindbergh and his young wife, Anne Morrow, ended only with the conviction and execution of the dour German immigrant Bruno Hauptmann, who had steadfastly maintained he had been framed, giving rise to conspiracy theories still widely believed today.

In the wake of the kidnapping, Lindbergh withdrew emotionally. Never shedding a tear himself over his lost son, he forbade his wife to cry as well. After the birth of each of their five other children, he would insist that she accompany him on distant journeys, so as to wean her from the newborn.* In later years, her husband's unyielding reticence and rigid self-discipline would leave her repeatedly on the verge of breaking down. These episodes disclosed an especially frigid aspect of what his biographer calls Lindbergh's "Nordic *sang-froid*."

Convinced that America had descended into barbarism, the Lindberghs fled the country in 1935, settling for a time in England. They returned four years later, but Charles's disillusionment with the U.S. had not abated. As World War II approached, he plunged into the isolationist America First movement. To many it seemed he was lending his prestige to the nascent American fascism espoused by Father Charles Coughlin and Senator Huey Long. In nationwide radio addresses, Lindbergh darkly inveighed against the "Jewish" media; his letters and diary entries from the period abound with musings about "the pressing sea of Yellow, Black, and Brown" and "the infiltration of inferior blood."

Nor did Lindbergh disguise his admiration for Germany's industrial and military revival under the Nazis. In richly publicized trips, he toured the new Reich's airplane factories and allowed himself to be feted and decorated. He refused to denounce Nazi atrocities—he would continue in this refusal even after the war—and became for a time as mistrusted in the United States as he had once been adored.

After Pearl Harbor, Lindbergh sought redemption. Denied a military commission by Franklin Roosevelt, who had always disliked him, he volunteered his services to the burgeoning Army air force and won praise for his courage and effectiveness flying missions in the Pacific. In peacetime, he spent years developing the fresh, evocative prose that earned him a Pulitzer prize for *The Spirit of St. Louis* (1953), his splendid memoir of his flight. And there was a final surprise: by the time of his death in 1974, Lindbergh had repudiated the very technology he had done so much to romanticize. Reborn as a conservationist, he proclaimed himself at one with birds rather than airplanes.

A. SCOTT BERG relates this remarkable story with energy and competence, unfolding his themes with a naturalness possible only because he has mastered vast quantities of detail. The highlight of the book, fittingly, is Lindbergh's historic flight to Paris. Berg makes us see just how grand a feat it was, fully the equal of the moon landing 42 years later. Indeed, for all the courage of the Apollo astronauts, their success was a coronation of large-scale technological wizardry. Lindbergh's achievement, by contrast, was swashbuckingly human. In a *tour de force* of narration, Berg evokes the eerie otherworldliness of the trans-Atlantic flight, and the mysterious power it conferred on Lindbergh as *ur*-aviator.

But in the instant Lindbergh's life begins its descent, so too does Berg's biography. After the landing at Le Bourget, the action flags, the drama wanes. For the remainder of the book, Berg's attention is captured by the emotional travails of Anne Lindbergh during her 45-year marriage to a trying, distant husband.

More problematically, Berg—whose previous subjects were the literary editor Maxwell Perkins and the movie mogul Samuel Gold-

* One of the children has recently published her own account of the family's life: *Under a Wing: A Memoir*, by Reeve Lindbergh. Simon & Schuster, 223 pp. $23.00.

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wyn—seems unnerved by the complex social and political currents of the 1930's. His pages on the kidnapping trial—expert but businesslike, in the manner of a prosecutor hurrying to convict—skimp on the atmospherics that might help us see why this was the most gripping of Depression-era dramas, a cathartic public spectacle, and why it belongs in the sequence of politically-charged trials that includes the Sacco-Vanzetti case and the confrontation between Alger Hiss and Whittaker Chambers.

Even more disappointing is the book's cursory treatment of Lindbergh's misadventures in isolationism. Berg forgoes any deep exploration of the America First movement or of the kindred malign forces abroad in the U.S. as late as 1941. Lindbergh's political activities come at us as a string of regrettable incidents, not as the crisis of character they plainly were. Important questions hide murkily below the smooth surface of the narrative, and Berg seems afraid of touching them. Did Lindbergh, with his matchless celebrity, really see himself as an unelected tribune destined to keep the nation out of war? Was he motivated by a lingering hatred of the public? Was he following the doomed example of his father, whose own political career ended catastrophically when he became a vocal opponent of American entry into World War I?

The irony is that in his peak years, no other man succeeded so well as Lindbergh in binding the Old World to the New, not only because of his great transoceanic flight but also because he effortlessly embodied traits that seemed uniquely American: modesty, courage, plainspokenness, innocence, and invincible youth. But the darker side of Lindbergh was of course no less American and no less integral to his being. It is this conjunction of light and dark, of heroism and folly, that continues to make Lindbergh so intriguing, even as his claim to our interest steadily weakens.

Breaking the Rules

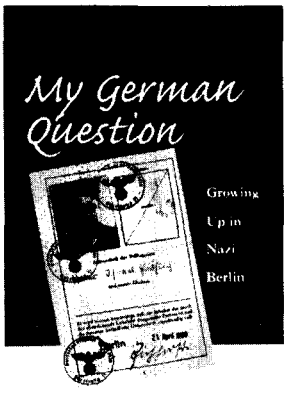
Bech at Bay: A Quasi-Novel
by John Updike
Knopf. 241 pp. $23.00

Reviewed by
John Gross

In the last of the five stories that make up *Bech at Bay*, John Updike describes what happens when

John Gross *is the author of* Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy *and* The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters, *and the editor, most recently, of* The New Oxford Book of English Prose.

"[A] moving book."*



My German Question
Growing Up in Nazi Berlin
Peter Gay

"[An] eloquent memoir of [Gay's] Berlin youth in the 1930s, his family's escape and his ambivalence toward Germany and the Germans after 1945."—Jeffrey Herf, *Wall Street Journal*

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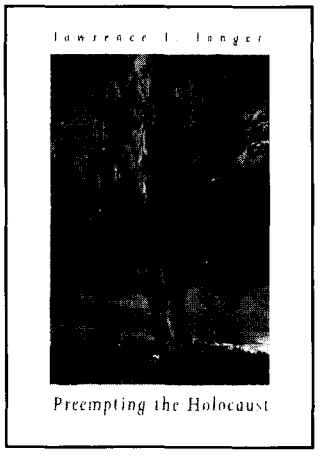

Preempting the Holocaust
Lawrence L. Langer

This compelling book, in which Lawrence Langer explores the use of Holocaust themes in literature, memoirs, film, and painting is "a significant contribution to the field of Holocaust studies."—Michael Berenbaum

"Langer [is] one of our most eloquent Holocaust scholars."—*Kirkus Reviews**
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his protagonist, Henry Bech, is awarded the 1999 Nobel Prize for Literature. The announcement is greeted with scorn and incredulity; the *New York Daily News* goes so far as to run a front-page headline inquiring, "BECH? WHODAT???"

In reality, few readers of superior fiction will need to be told whodat. Bech is the moderately famous novelist who has featured in two previous Updike collections, *Bech: A Book* (1970) and *Bech Is Back* (1982). He was born in 1923—nine years before his creator John Updike—and published his first novel, *Travel Light* ("a semi-Beat near-classic") in 1955, four years before Updike published *his* first novel. A big novel called *The Chosen*—no connection with Chaim Potok—flopped in 1963; a sexy novel, *Think Big*, was a best-seller in 1979. During his fallow periods, which have been extensive, he has spent much of his time lecturing on campuses or traveling abroad, especially in Eastern Europe, as an ambassador of contemporary American fiction. He has been married once, unsuccessfully; he tends to become involved with women on a more or less intimate basis wherever he goes. And he is Jewish—very much so.

The first story in *Bech at Bay* finds Bech back in Europe, in a Czechoslovakia where the Communists are still in power (the year is 1986)—lecturing, staying at the American embassy, feeling ill at ease with dissidents and apparatchiks alike. Next, five years on, he is inveigled into becoming president of the Forty, a privately endowed academy of the arts that meets in a handsome townhouse in midtown Manhattan; not long after being installed, he is invited to preside over its dissolution. Then it is back in time to 1972 and across to Los Angeles, where the most conspicuous result of a journalistic assignment is a $10-million libel action brought against him by Morris Ohrbach, one of Hollywood's most feared movie agents.

The last two stories in the book bring Bech close up against the elemental facts of death and birth. In "Bech Noir," set in 1997, he hits on a technique for avenging himself on the literary critics whose slights he has had to endure over the years. He starts murdering them, using increasingly ingenious means; although Robin Teagarden, the "post-Jewish" twenty-six-year-old who has moved in with him, eventually tumbles to what is going on, the discovery merely serves to make her find him more exciting. Finally, in "Bech and the Bounty of Sweden," he travels to Stockholm for the Nobel ceremonies, accompanied by Robin and their eight-month-old daughter Golda. (When it comes to naming her child, it turns out that Robin is "not so post-Jewish after all.")

THE SONOROUS phrase, "bounty of Sweden," is a borrowing from an earlier and actual Nobel laureate, W.B. Yeats. Used in connection with the prosaic Bech, it is comically inappropriate—and also a reminder of the extent to which the Bech saga is a prolonged literary game. Nothing in this new collection is as skittish as the bibliography of writings by and about Bech that Updike appended to *Bech: A Book* (a number of the—needless to say—spurious items in that bibliography were listed as having appeared in COMMENTARY); but there is an abundance of artfulness even so. Updike has plainly enjoyed himself fabricating a literary world tantalizingly close to the real thing, yet distorted at every turn by touches of parody and burlesque, and the more solidly grounded Bech is made to seem, the more playfully implausible his adventures become. All the stories in *Bech at Bay*, with the possible exception of the Czech episode, could reasonably be classified as entertainments, but the last two—Bech as serial killer, Bech crowned by the Swedish Academy—are unashamed extravaganzas.

Viewed purely as light fiction, the stories are admirable. The debates among the decrepit members of the Forty, Bech's contribution to a *Festschrift* for an ancient rival, the fake letters sent to an intended victim in "Bech Noir"—material of this kind could hardly be better handled. Updike has a sharpness of eye and a lightness of touch that set him far apart from most of what currently passes for literary satire.

At the same time, Bech is no mere stooge. The stories reach beyond entertainment; they invite us, in varying degrees, to take poor old Henry seriously—to share his aspirations, to enter into his sorrows. And up to a point we accede. The comedy is often rueful; it allows for a certain amount of sympathy. But it can also be uncomfortably inconsistent, and the relatively straight moments are hard to square with the more farcical or cartoonish ones. To cite only the most obvious instance, just how seriously can we take Bech's subsequent adventures—or, in retrospect, his earlier ones—after he has been subjected to the black humor of "Bech Noir"?

It may be that Updike is simply amusing himself by breaking the rules and mixing incompatible modes. Certainly he seems to be teasing us when, in the subtitle, he describes *Bech at Bay* as a "quasi-novel," for "novel" implies a coherence the book does not actually possess (though of course "quasi" is always an escape hatch). At the climax, or what would be the climax if this *were* a novel, broad comedy and high seriousness are scrambled together in a positively defiant manner. Bech delivers an impassioned Nobel lecture on life, art, and "the nature of human existence" while holding baby Golda in his arms; she in turn behaves much as you would expect her to. The effect, alas, is rather corny. It somehow recalls Frank Capra.

IF BECH is best taken one story at a time, two elements in his personal-

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ity remain constant. He is forever struggling with his fate as a writer, and we cannot be in his presence for long without being reminded that he is a Jew. His Jewishness in fact constitutes the most distinctive aspect of his appeal as a literary artifact. Without it, it seems inconceivable that the Bech stories would have given readers the *frisson* they did when they first began to appear nearly 30 years ago; and however much the world has changed since then, they still retain the faint shadow of a violated taboo. In creating Bech, Updike was challenging a supposed area of Jewish uniqueness, the tacit assumption that only a Jewish novelist could create convincing Jewish characters. In a friendly spirit (and you might say that the very attempt was an act of friendship) he was setting out to demonstrate that a non-Jew could get it right.

His achievement in this respect is impressive as far as it goes. The small social details are plausible. So, for the most part, are the mannerisms and habits of thought. Though Bech's life does not appear to have much of a Jewish hinterland—in terms of culture, social activities, or ideas—there is no particular reason why it should. It is a novelist's privilege to concentrate on the aspects of a character he is likely to handle best, and, within his limits, Bech has an authentically Jewish feel—rather more so, I would say, than James Joyce's dubiously Jewish Jew, Leopold Bloom.

The episode in the new collection with the highest Jewish content is "Bech Pleads Guilty," the story of Bech's lawsuit with the dread Morris Ohrbach. At one level it is a neatly constructed courtroom drama; but as the case develops, strange feelings stir. Bech's hostility toward Ohrbach starts to melt away. He cannot help identifying him with his own father, Abe Bech the diamond dealer, who has died the previous year. (A New York death: he collapsed on the subway, "under the sliding filth of the East River.") By the end of the story we have been vouchsafed some glimpses of Bech's adolescence in Brooklyn, and given an insight into the guilt—filial, not legal—to which the title wittily alludes. The whole performance is a small triumph of cultural empathy.

The other overtly Jewish passages are mostly found in the opening story, "Bech in Czech." They are beautifully written, but they feel somewhat dutiful and external—extracts from a traveler's notebook as he visits Kafka's grave, ponders the drawings of children murdered in the Holocaust, reflects on the fact that the American embassy in Prague was once the home of a Jewish banker. By comparison, the Ohrbach imbroglio seems frivolous, but it

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has been more fully imagined from the inside.

Bech at his best remains an essentially comic creation. But we are still left wondering why, at the end of *Bech at Bay*, he is not racked by at least occasional guilt at the thought of all those critics he has dispatched. True, they were only critics; but they were human beings, too. In the next book, will his adventures perhaps take a Dostoevskian turn—Bech as the hero of a latter-day *Crime and Punishment*?

Roads Not Taken

The Wrong War:
Why We Lost in Vietnam
by Jeffrey Record
Naval Institute Press. 217 pp. $27.95

Reviewed by
Max Boot

SAIGON FELL almost a quarter-century ago, yet the Vietnam war still haunts our recurring debates over when and where—and whether—to send American soldiers abroad. Should the United States intervene in Kosovo? Bosnia? Haiti? Iraq? In every such discussion one hears the refrain of "no more Vietnams," especially from those senior military officers who themselves served an apprenticeship of fire in Indochina. Indeed, one such officer, General Colin Powell, formulated a highly restrictive doctrine based on our failure in that war. According to Powell, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the U.S. should never again commit troops abroad unless vital American interests are at stake, strong public support and clear military objectives are present, overwhelming force will be applied, and an "exit strategy" is in place.

Yet drawing lessons from Vietnam, especially lessons that set such a high threshold for American military engagement, is an inherently suspect enterprise, if for no other reason than that there is still no agreement on precisely how America went astray in that conflict. Several large questions are the focus of continuing controversy: Should we have been in Vietnam to begin with? Could we have won? Who or what is responsible for our defeat? These questions inform *The Wrong War* by Jeffrey Record, a former defense-policy aide to Senators Sam Nunn and Lloyd Bentsen who served in the "pacification" program in the Mekong Delta from 1967 to 1969. Although his book tells us little that is not already known about the course of the war itself, it does offer a succinct summary of where things stand in the ongoing debate about it.

The title of Record's book provides a capsule summary of his own position: namely, that we should not have been in Vietnam in the first place. American policy-makers, according to Record, both underestimated Ho Chi Minh's nationalist appeal and overestimated the threat that a Communist Indochina would pose to U.S. interests. On this particular point, Record's view coincides with the consensus that emerged among American liberals in the late 1960's, when it became more and more acceptable to favor abandoning our commitment to defend South Vietnam.

After examining the misconceptions that led the U.S. to stumble into the war, Record proceeds to tackle the subject of why we lost. He sketches two major schools of thought that formed in the mid-1960's, as we were losing the battle. One, championed by much of the military establishment as well as by conservative opinion, held that our mistake was to have concentrated on the guerrilla conflict in the South instead of waging a conventional war against North Vietnam. As General Curtis LeMay, the Air Force chief of staff, put it: "We should stop swatting flies and go after the manure pile." The second, represented primarily by the leadership of the CIA and the Marines, plus counterinsurgency experts like Robert Thompson and John Paul Vann, maintained that the U.S. was placing *too* much emphasis on conventional warfare, and would do better to focus on programs aimed at "winning hearts and minds" and keeping the South Vietnamese countryside free from Communist penetration.

The Wrong War suggests that both schools of thought were mistaken. According to Record, the war was unwinnable, for the simple reason that winning it was less important to Washington than it was to Hanoi. As evidence, he points to the losses North Vietnam was willing to sustain in pursuit of its objectives—1.1 million dead and 300,000 missing out of a population base of twenty million (or, as Record writes, 36 times more casualties, proportionately, than those suffered by Union troops in the struggle to defeat the Confederacy in the American Civil War). Given the degree of commitment indicated by these figures, there was almost nothing we could have done to break the Communists' resolve "except via measures—an invasion of North Vietnam or an unrestricted air attack on its population—that were never seriously considered by either civilian or military authorities."

THE CLEAR implication of Record's analysis is that, just as American entry into Vietnam was misguided, the final, disastrous outcome of our engagement there was inevitable. But was it? Many of the mistakes we made in fighting the war are easy to see in retrospect. But it defies reason that the United States, which two decades earlier had beaten back the combined might of Germany,

MAX BOOT, *a new contributor, is editorial-features editor of the* Wall Street Journal.

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Italy, and Japan, could not vanquish the war machine of a small pre-industrial society like North Vietnam. Contrary to Record, a case can be made that a military strategy based on either or both of the two favored approaches—securing the countryside of the South, or unleashing an attack on the North—might have saved the day, provided it had been pursued with determination.

On the surface, a conventional strategy would appear to have held out the greater promise. After all, when Saigon finally fell in 1975, it was not to Vietcong guerrillas but to North Vietnamese regulars in tanks. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who did in fact advocate an aggressive conventional policy against the North, lost the strategic debate within American policy circles. President Lyndon Johnson was overly afraid of a Chinese incursion (at the very moment, ironically, that China was turning inward and entering its Cultural Revolution), and was not eager to undertake actions abroad that would distract even more from his Great Society programs than the war was already doing.

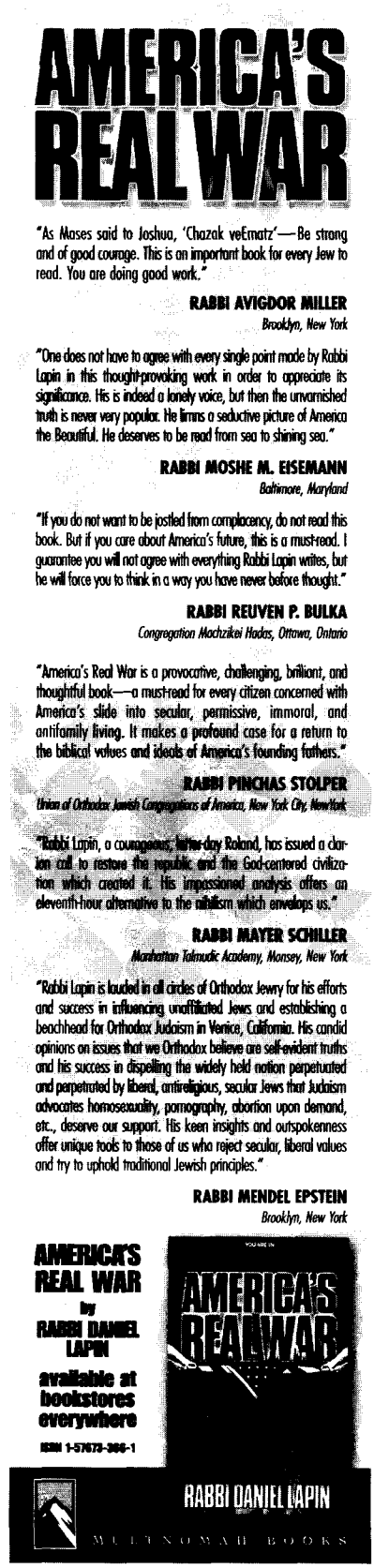
Alternatively, pacification, too, might have worked. Programs like the Combined Action Platoons—in which small Marine units joined South Vietnamese soldiers in defending individual villages—had proved their worth. If applied on a larger and consistent scale, they could have helped decisively in holding South Vietnam together. Yet, thanks to the opposition of William Westmoreland and other Army generals, this approach, too, was never adopted under Johnson. Instead, we followed a neither-fish-nor-fowl strategy in which the 500,000 men we had committed to Vietnam could neither pursue a true counterinsurgency strategy nor take the war to enemy territory.

Only after 1968 did the U.S. fix on the right course, successfully borrowing and combining elements from both the conventional-warfare and pacification schools. The Vietcong were decimated in their failed Tet offensive and all but wiped out by the CIA's Phoenix program, which sought to identify and capture Communist operatives in the hamlets of the South. And, at precisely the same moment the guerrillas were losing their sting, North Vietnam was being forced to fight a conventional war—the kind of conflict that American firepower was best suited for. Hanoi's 1972 Easter offensive, for example, on which the North had pinned great hopes, was stopped in its tracks.

By then, however, it was too late: the American people had lost the stomach to fight, and the Nixon administration had initiated a phased withdrawal that ended in the rout of 1975. We will thus never know the answer to the question of whether, if the American military had adopted the proper strategy years earlier, South Vietnam might have been saved. But it is at least conceivable.

There are lessons to be drawn from the U.S. debacle in Southeast Asia, but they are hardly summed up by the slogan "no more Vietnams," which tells us only that America should avoid losing a war. While Jeffrey Record has produced an engaging survey of various positions in our longstanding national debate, his own rather fatalistic interpretation of the roads taken in that conflict hardly constitutes the last word. In particular, his unwillingness to consider paths that might have led to victory are uncomfortably of a piece with the shibboleths that have given us self-paralyzing conceptions like the Powell doctrine.

Surely Colin Powell and others are right to conclude from Vietnam that America should never send its soldiers into harm's way without the tools to defend themselves. And they are right again to caution that, if we are going to enter a major war,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we should fight to win. But in the years ahead the United States is certain to confront ever more foreign-policy crises in which our interests are less than clear and public opinion is unformed. It compounds the tragedy of Vietnam when its legacy is invoked to justify the shirking of our responsibilities abroad.

Literary Conscience

Najib Mahfuz: The Novelist-Philosopher of Cairo

by Menahem Milson

St. Martin's Press. 336 pp. $49.95

Reviewed by
Daniel Pipes

THE EGYPTIAN novelist Naguib Mahfouz (as his name is more commonly spelled), winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature, is one of those authors—like Norman Mailer or Salman Rushdie—whose lives and political views sometimes overshadow their fiction. Although he commands a decidedly smaller stage than either Mailer or Rushdie—that is, the Arabic-speaking as opposed to the English-speaking world—he dominates it far more thoroughly. His comments are sought on a huge range of subjects, his life is the stuff of gossip sheets, his influence is felt from think tanks to movie studios, and politicians dare not ignore his views. Indeed, as Menahem Milson, a professor of Arabic literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, writes in this lucid and insightful review of Mahfouz's career, he is both "Egypt's most popular writer" and "the literary conscience of his country"—not a common pairing.

The good news is that this colossus of the Arab cultural world, who is now in his late eighties, holds highly attractive views. On key issues facing Egyptians, he has consistently advocated a moderate and sensible outlook. The bad news, for all of us, is that such an outlook is still capable of stirring the most intense controversy within Egypt and the Arab world generally, as was attested by the uproar surrounding the publication of Mahfouz's frank memoirs last June.

Not that the views expressed in those memoirs were anything new. Thus, from the start Mahfouz had loathed Gamal Abdel Nasser, the enormously popular ruler of Egypt from 1952 to 1970, for his attempt to remake the country through revolution, for his subservience to Moscow, and for the police state he imposed on the Egyptian people. Perhaps what most perturbed Mahfouz was Nasser's disregard for Egyptian national interests, symbolized by his erasing of Egypt's very name in favor of an imaginary "United Arab Republic." Indeed, Mahfouz is a stalwart patriot, one who in his work expresses his "love affair with Egypt" (in the phrase of an Egyptian critic) by portraying the country allegorically as a beloved woman fallen into the hands of often rapacious males. Rulers like Nasser, who take liberties with Mahfouz's beloved, are exposed to scathing contempt.

Mahfouz's views have been equally outspoken when it comes to the conflict with Israel. In 1952, when Nasser's regime came to power, Mahfouz had hopes that it would deal first with Egypt's "genuine and historic enemies—poverty, ignorance, disease, and dictatorship," before taking on foreign adversaries. Instead, it made anti-Zionism the center of its program. To this day Mahfouz despairs of this mistake. He has long advocated closing down the conflict with Israel, less out of affection for the Jewish state than from a recognition of the damage the confrontation has done to Egypt in lives lost, economic progress sacrificed, and liberties curtailed. In his view, no foreign issue justifies such a cost.

Finally, although a Muslim himself, Mahfouz deeply mistrusts fundamentalist Muslims, and has been unafraid to put his feelings in print, if often through the characteristic means of allegory. As long ago as 1959 he wrote a tale, *Children of Gebelawi*, that succeeded in antagonizing the fundamentalists so thoroughly that they never forgot it. Shortly after the Ayatollah Khomeini issued his 1989 edict against Salman Rushdie for writing *The Satanic Verses*, one Egyptian fundamentalist declared:

> If only we had behaved in the proper Islamic manner with Naguib Mahfouz, we would not have been assailed by the appearance of Salman Rushdie. Had we killed Naguib Mahfouz, Salman Rushdie would not have appeared.

Not to be outdone, Omar Abdel-Rahman, the Egyptian sheik now serving many life sentences in Leavenworth, Kansas, for his role in inspiring terrorism in New York City, condemned Mahfouz to death. And in October 1994, a young fundamentalist Muslim stabbed the then-eighty-three-year-old Mahfouz in the neck, an act of vengeance for his anti-fundamentalist attitudes.

FOR SOMEONE who has stirred so much venom, Mahfouz's biography is rather bland. Born in 1911, he was the youngest of seven children in a middle-class family in Cairo. His mother, who had a difficult childbirth, gratefully named him after the doctor (a Christian, as it happens) who delivered him. Mahfouz first appeared in print when still a teenager, writing on religion and socialism in a prominent magazine. An ardent student of phi-

DANIEL PIPES *is editor of the* Middle East Quarterly *and the author of* The Rushdie Affair: The Novel, the Ayatollah, and the West *(Birch Lane Press), among other books.*

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losophy, he applied for a government scholarship in 1934 to study in Europe but was passed over, presumably because, thanks to his name, the committee thought him a Christian.

Mahfouz took a job as a secretary at a university—the first of a long series of administrative positions. In 1936, having decided his true vocation was as a writer, he adopted a discipline somewhat resembling that of the 19th-century British novelist Anthony Trollope, performing ably at his civil-service job by day and writing during his spare time. By this method he produced, again like Trollope, a huge corpus—52 books, plus innumerable articles and screenplays. But for a long time fame eluded him: he passed years of frustration as a novelist while seeking refuge in the writing of film scripts. Only with the publication in the mid-1950's of his "Cairo Trilogy" (*Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *The Sugar Bowl*) did Mahfouz finally win the acclaim that has been his ever since.

Throughout his career, Mahfouz has kept to an extremely rigorous schedule; friends used to joke that they could set their watches by his daily regimen. He has also traveled little; as Milson notes, he "has never vacationed, let alone lived, outside of Egypt, except for two short trips he made as a member of official delegations to Yugoslavia and to Yemen."

But beneath the clockwork surface there are a few surprises, of both a personal and a professional nature. When he married in 1954, Mahfouz kept the liaison secret for years from virtually everyone, including his own mother. Perhaps more strikingly, this paragon of free expression filled, for over two decades, the position of chief censor in Egypt's Ministry of Culture—and for half that time he worked for the despised Nasser. Throughout his career, indeed, Mahfouz has taken particular care not to allow his opinions to cross over the line into open confrontation. He has worried about rousing the authorities to the point of taking action against him, perhaps even banishing him, Solzhenitsyn-style, from his homeland, and has kept a cautious eye on the forces swirling through Egypt's public life.

Hence his reliance on the arts of literary subterfuge. In *The Novelist-Philosopher of Cairo*, Milson breaks new ground by demonstrating just how wily Mahfouz is as a writer who uses allegory, myth, symbolism, and other devices to convey his true thoughts. A full third of this study is devoted to deciphering the significance of the personal names Mahfouz assigns to characters—a little bit in the manner of Dickens, but less playfully and more fearfully. The point is, as Milson rightly observes, that in Mahfouz, "words always have more than one level of meaning."

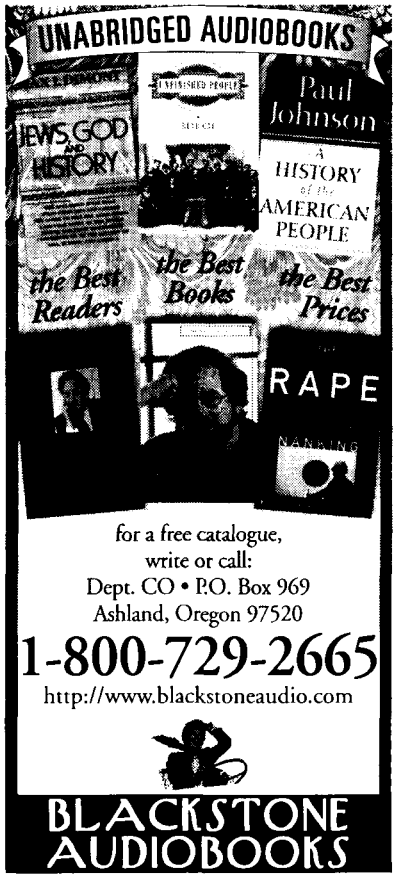
That Mahfouz exerts a benign and moderating influence on the turbulent politics of the Arabic-speaking countries is something for which one must be grateful. But is he a great artist? True, the sages of Stockholm bestowed the world's most famous prize on him, but one suspects that in the end, the absence of any Arabic literary laureates weighed most heavily on them, and that Mahfouz was selected less as the leading belle-lettrist in a worldwide competition than as the confirmed giant among Arab writers.

I once spent an academic year in Cairo, enrolled in a program to polish my Arabic. It amounted to a crash course in modern Egyptian literature. Of the many novels I read, most left me deeply unimpressed. The plots seemed contrived, the characters thin, the language stilted. Had they been written in English, most of them, I concluded, would probably never have been published. Nor is this entirely surprising: the glory of Arabic literature remains poetry, not prose fiction. Mahfouz's own statement that "the novel is the poetry of the modern world" merely underscores how far most Arab authors have to go to master the form.

By this unexacting standard, at any rate, Mahfouz does indeed shine, even if by international standards he must be considered rather middling. Two of his works are truly compelling: *Palace Walk* (1956),* the first volume of the "Cairo Trilogy," offers a panoramic and lovingly observed account of three generations in a prosperous family living in pre-World War I Cairo. Particularly unforgettable is its portrait of a dictatorial husband and father who insists that his family live a thoroughly Islamic life while going off nearly every evening to pursue his own sybaritic pleasures. Similarly, *Arabian Nights and Days* (1982),† a set of fantastical stories about the town where the original "Thousand

* Translated by William M. Hutchins and Olive E. Kenny (Doubleday, 1991).

† Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies (Doubleday, 1995).



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and One Nights" are supposed to have occurred, is a modernized version of an ancient fable that succeeds surprisingly well.

But the two remaining volumes in the "Cairo Trilogy" fall off in quality from the first, and most of Mahfouz's other major works (like *The Beginning and the End*, *The Thief and the Dogs*, *Miramar*) repetitively and somewhat tediously pursue the same well-worn themes. Though he has been compared with Balzac, Mahfouz's vision is far more constricted than that of the great French master, and his stories fall correspondingly short. In addition, Mahfouz's work suffers from being, as Milson puts it, "the outcome of his desire to reform society." However laudable that desire may be, it gives his work a didactic and sometimes stifling quality.

In sum, and with the important exceptions noted, Mahfouz is an author perhaps better read about than read. Whether or not one already knows his work, one cannot do better than to read about him in Milson's fine appreciation.

Don't Tread on Me?

The Story of American Freedom
by Eric Foner
Norton. 422 pp. $27.95

Reviewed by
James Nuechterlein

HISTORY IN recent years has become a minimalist enterprise. Although large interpretative takes on the meaning of it all are hardly unknown, in the postmodernist academy they have for the most part given way to ever more rarefied inquiries into ever more restricted slices of the past. Where perspective is everything, and perspectives can be infinitely multiplied, the idea is not easily entertained that there might be something called, say, "the American experience," or that generalizations might usefully be made about it. Anyone contemplating such an exercise risks immediate suspicion that he (or, of course, she) is, as they say, "privileging" a hegemonic narrative that by definition marginalizes the voices of the nonprivileged.

How is it, then, that so impeccably credentialed a person of the Left as Eric Foner, the DeWitt Clinton professor of history at Columbia University and a member of the *Nation* editorial board, can hope to get away with so hegemonic-seeming a project as *The Story of American Freedom*? He does so by joining to a mostly old-fashioned progressive treatment of his subject the requisite obeisance to contemporary academic idols.

Thus, Foner modishly informs us in his introduction that the title of his book "is meant to be ambiguous or ironic (one might even call it postmodern)." A "story," after all, "is both a history of actual events and an invention." So also with the meaning of the word "freedom," a "protean" concept that "overspills the scholar's carefully constructed boundaries." If, in probing the ambiguities of his subject, Foner focuses on categories of "race, gender, and class," this is not, he hastens to assure us, "as a fashionable mantra" but because (and now the postmodernist meets the progressive) "non-whites, women, and laborers experienced firsthand the paradox that one person's freedom has frequently been linked to another's servitude."

Here we come upon Foner's major theme. While often invoked to justify the status quo, freedom, he writes, has also served more hopefully as a "protest ideal," exposing "the contradictions between what America claims to be and what it actually is." In his exhaustive (and sometimes exhausting) survey of the various meanings—political, economic, personal, moral—that Americans have attached to freedom from the Revolution until today, there can be no doubt that Foner himself clearly prefers eras of protest and reform to their conservative counterparts.

Eliciting his particular enthusiasm are two such moments. The first is exemplified by the Communist-inspired Popular Front of the late 1930's, a movement that united the Left from New Deal Democrats to the Communist party:

> In this broad left-wing culture, social and economic radicalism, not support for the status quo, defined true Americanism; ethnic and racial diversity was the glory of American society; and "the American way of life" meant unionism and social citizenship, not the unbridled pursuit of wealth.

Foner is similarly excited by the galvanizing effect the early civil-rights activists had on the Left in the 1960's:

> [T]he courage of thousands of ordinary men and women . . . who risked physical and economic retribution to lay claim to freedom inspired a host of other challenges to the status quo, including a mostly white student movement known as the "New Left," the "second wave" of feminism, and claims by other dispossessed minorities. Together, they restored to freedom the critical edge often lost in cold-war triumphalism, making it once again the rallying cry of the dispossessed.

THE DISMISSIVE reference to "cold-war triumphalism" indicates the negative pole of Foner's attachments. *The Story of Freedom* is not, it is important to note, *simply* history as a left-wing morality play. Foner is a serious and energetic scholar, and, if he tarries over history's victims, he does not entirely ignore, or merely denigrate, its ben-

JAMES NUECHTERLEIN *is editor of* First Things.

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eficiaries. For example, though he worries that, in the 1950's (as through much of the century), Americans became beguiled by "a consumer definition of freedom," he also concedes that in that decade "virtually all Americans reaped the rewards of an era of unprecedented expansion and rising living standards."

Still, Foner's attempt to do justice to the complexities of his subject cannot hide the fact that he has little patience for conservatives in general, and for anti-Communists in particular. "The tiny Communist party," he writes in exoneration of radical activists of the 1950's, "hardly posed a threat to American security and many of the victims of the Red Scare had little or nothing to do with Communism," being guilty of "nothing more than holding unpopular beliefs." Such insouciance suggests, at best, a lack of familiarity with recent treatments of the subject, including even so fervently anti-anti-Communist a tome as Ellen Schrecker's *Many Are the Crimes*.*

When he gets to the presidency of Ronald Reagan, Foner loses all semblance of objectivity. "Like most conservatives," he writes, Reagan "exempted the economy from his abhorrence of self-interested behavior and his demand for moral action, making the unremitting pursuit of profit the sole arbiter of right and wrong." As the President's policies "inspired a speculative frenzy that enriched architects of corporate takeovers, plungers in the stock market, and sellers of 'junk bonds,'" the poor reaped only "plant closings, job losses, and devastated communities." In the final sentence of the book, Foner expresses the wan hope that "the better angels of our nature" will recall Americans to nobler visions of freedom than the callous Social Darwinism that is the Reagan legacy.

IN THE end, Foner's problem is that he is unsympathetic to the type of freedom that the majority of Americans embrace. Freedom comes in many versions, but from the Revolution onward its dominant form in this country has been "freedom from": from the threat of overweening government, from intrusive public regulation of private economic activity, from interference by virtually any external agent in the definition and pursuit of one's preferred manner of life. "Don't tread on me" is, for better and for worse, the distinctively American way of freedom.

Foner, by contrast, prefers a more expansive version of freedom, one that encompasses "freedom to" as well as "freedom from," or, to adapt Isaiah Berlin's terms, positive as well as negative freedom. Foner speaks glowingly of "freedom as economic security, freedom as active participation in democratic governance, freedom as social justice for those long disadvantaged." Where most Americans, most of the time, have looked askance at government as an enemy of freedom, Foner admires those periods—the Civil War and Reconstruction, the New Deal, the liberationist 1960's—when activist governments in pursuit of grand and sometimes coercive visions presented themselves as freedom's ally.

But those more statist moments have been the exception, not the rule. Foner himself ruefully notes that most Americans, when asked to choose between freedom and equality, opt for freedom, and by percentages far higher than anywhere else in the industrialized world. Given that fact, it is not surprising that *The Story of American Freedom* has so equivocal a tone and ends on so dyspeptic a note.

* See my review of this book in the June 1998 COMMENTARY.

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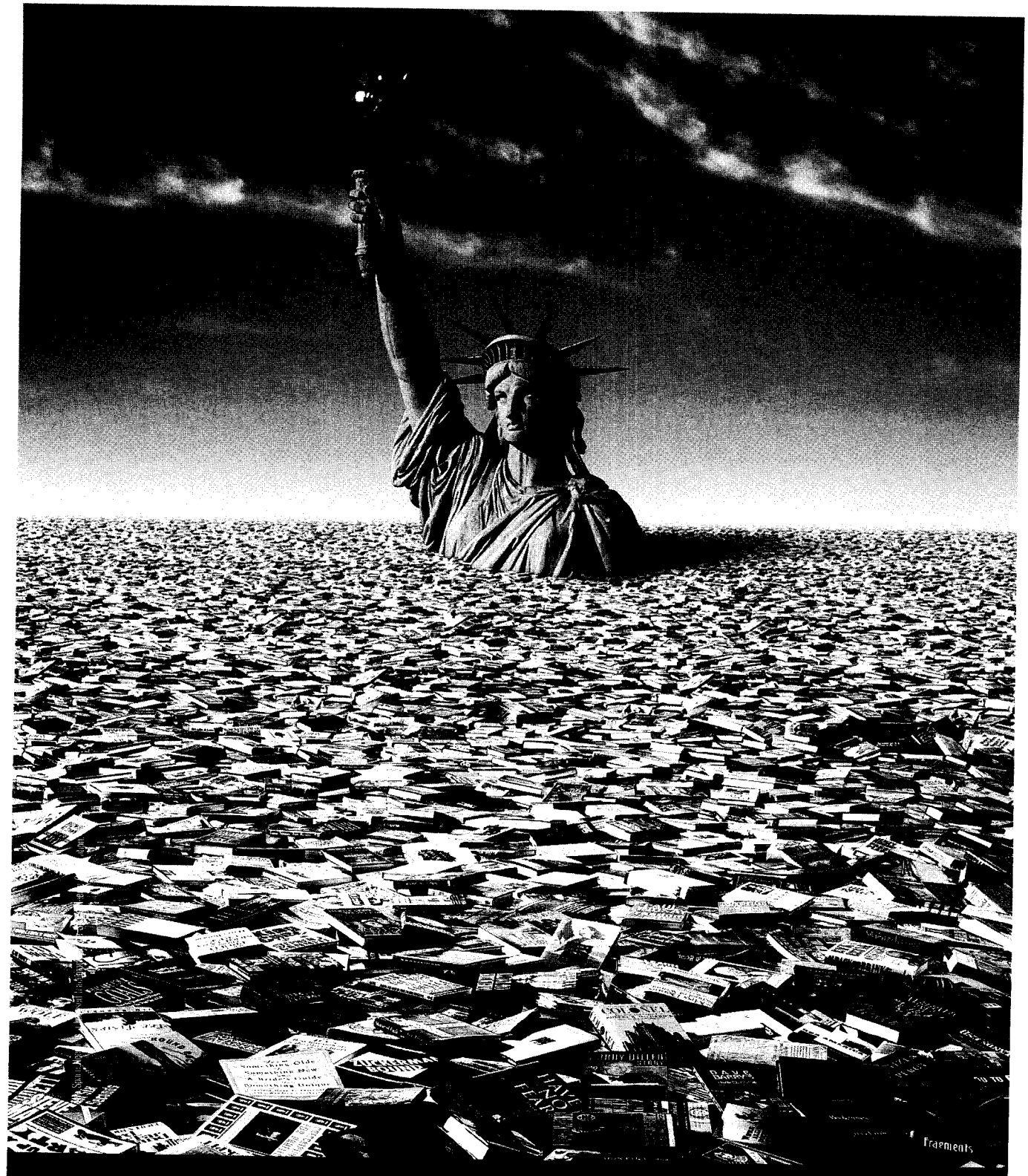

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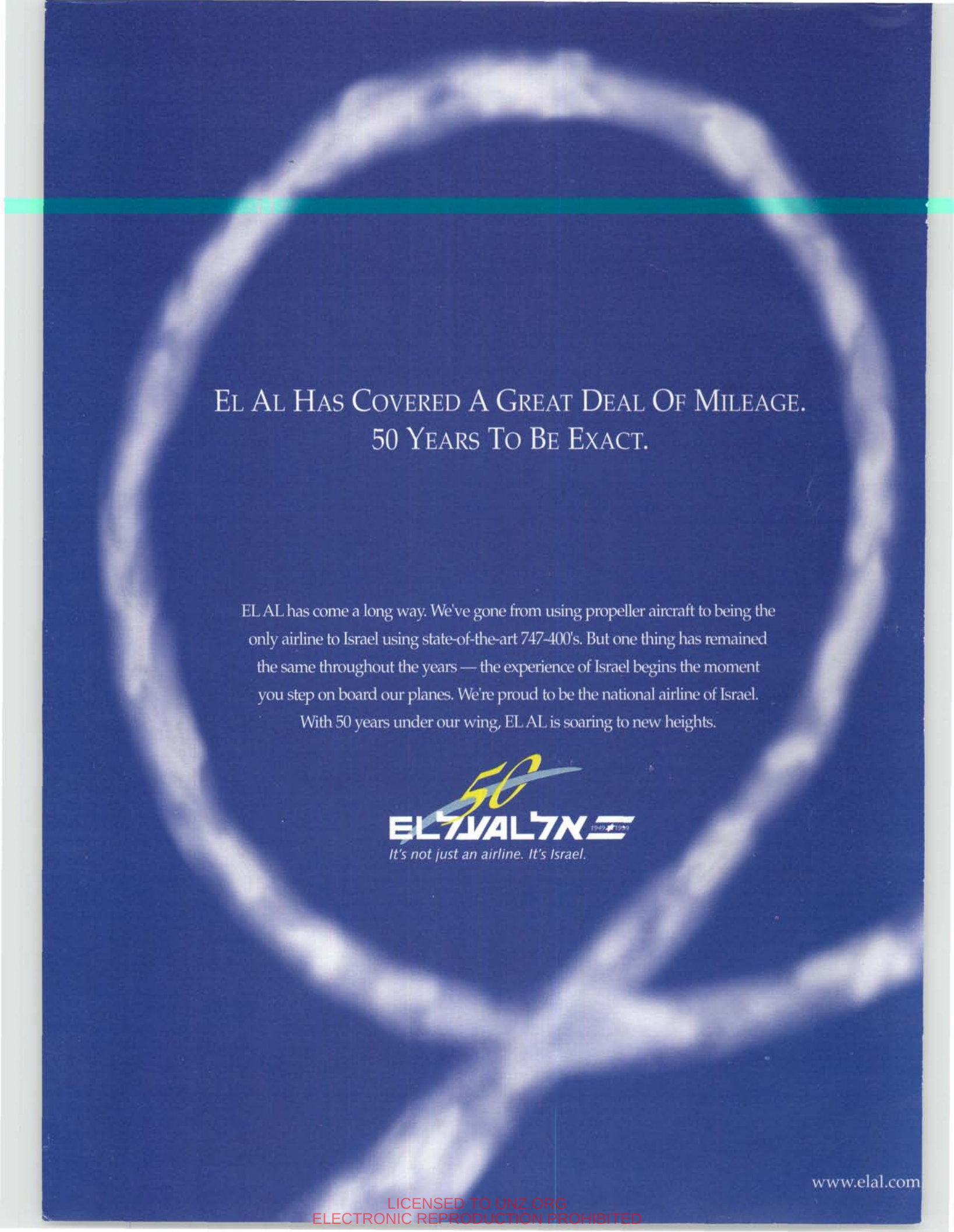
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